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THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE VIRGIN BIRTH

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended to be a literary and critical examination of the historical evidence for the Virgin Birth. It is not the writer's desire to discuss the evidence from the point of view of an advocate; with a view, that is to say, of obtaining an uncompromising verdict. His aim is rather to trace and to define the earliest Christian tradition upon the subject, and to show the limits and the bearings of the historical question.

A limited aim such as this ought not to require much justification. If, however, justification is needed, it is not far to seek.

Much of the literature which treats of the Virgin Birth is controversial in point of origin if not in form, and, in the nature of the case, it could not have been otherwise. Controversial literature has, of course, a necessary place in the search for truth. Nevertheless, it is exposed to serious perils, especially when such a subject as that of the Virgin Birth is discussed. It is not always easy, for example, to avoid an arbitrary treatment of the New Testament, and to prevent philosophic or dogmatic presuppositions from determining purely critical questions. Few will deny that the discussion of the Virgin Birth has suffered in these directions, and that, as a consequence, the problem remains in considerable confusion. Not only has the evidence been variously estimated, but there are the widest differences of opinion as to what the evidence really is. Neither side has succeeded in convincing the other, and very many students of the question preserve an attitude of suspended judgement.

The point which it is important to make is that, if any escape is to be made from the present impasse, the problem must be approached in another way. Doctrinal presuppositions must be resolutely laid aside; there must be a common desire to ascertain the true facts of the evidence, whatever the results may be. Not that dogmatic considerations have no place in the problem! It is part of the conclusion reached in this book that in the end

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dogmatic considerations do determine the issue. But it must be 'in the end'; not at the beginning, nor in the middle.

It may be that the writer has not himself escaped the perils to which he has referred. He can only say that no pains have been spared to achieve this purpose. It is true that the problem has been faced with a conviction that, while truly man, Jesus was much more than man as we know him to be. But this is not a presupposition which colours the evidence. On the contrary, it is the one point of view which recognizes that there is a problem to be solved. If our Lord was a prophet, and no more, there is no real difficulty; no one would defend the Virgin Birth upon such terms. The question becomes a living issue only when Jesus is believed to be more than man.

In Chapter I the New Testament evidence outside the First and Third Gospels is discussed. On the question of the attitude of the Fourth Evangelist to the Virgin Birth—a question as difficult as it is interesting—the writer has been glad to accept and to work out a striking suggestion made by Dr. E. F. Scott (*The Fourth Gospel, its Purpose and Theology*).

One reason for allotting three chapters to the Third Gospel is the complexity of the Lukan problem. The theory which is outlined in Chapter IV is one which has not yet received sufficient consideration. The alternative, in the opinion of the writer, is to regard the Miraculous Conception as a 'necessary stone in the structure' of Lk. i, ii. It is the difficulties mentioned in Chapter II which have prevented him from taking this view. The writer is convinced that St. Luke believed and taught the Virgin Birth. Nevertheless, the critical difficulties are such that it has not been found possible to accept this view in the form in which it is generally held.

It is well to remember that he who states a theory in connexion with such problems contributes to their solution, whether his theory stands the test of time or not. Even in the case of failure the possibilities are reduced and a by-path is revealed as such. As an illustration of this, reference may be made to the view which ascribes the Virgin Birth tradition in Lk. i, ii to an unknown and later writer.

One chapter (Chapter V) has been assigned to the First Gospel. The exposition there given is one which is widely held

in this country, but an attempt has been made to emphasize the unique character of the Evangelist's standpoint, which, it is believed, is the key to the textual problem of Mt. i. 16. The textual problem is treated in an Appendix to the chapter.

It may seem strange that in Chapter VI no decided opinion is expressed for or against the Virgin Birth. The justification for this position is the fact that, in the end, the question becomes one of Theology, and that to attack the theological problem would be to go beyond the limited aim which the present work has in view.

One result of the investigation is that the documentary evidence for the Virgin Birth is found to be earlier than 'negative' criticism has allowed. But to accept this conclusion is only to be brought face to face with the question which the modern New Testament student cannot escape. 'Whence come the sources upon which the Evangelists drew?' At first sight the problem seems hopeless. To recover and to describe with objectivity of statement the several sources which the Evangelists employed is a task beset with difficulties: to penetrate still further might well seem impossible. If, however, the problem is faced bravely, with an open mind and an eagerness to learn, it may be that as time passes there will be cause to rejoice over real progress made. The journey is not the plunge into the dark which it might be thought to be. If, indeed, it will bring men nearer to the Jesus of history, it is a quest which cannot be refused, however great the difficulties may be.

In a subject such as this, certain things have necessarily to be taken for granted. The author of the First Gospel is regarded as unknown; accordingly, he is spoken of as the First Evangelist or as St. 'Matthew'. The writer of the Fourth Gospel is also referred to as the Fourth Evangelist, the question of authorship being left open. St. Mark and St. Luke, the companions of St. Paul, are assumed to be the authors of the Second and Third Gospels respectively; St. Luke is also believed to be the author of the Acts. The reader who does not accept these views may mentally substitute such phrases as the Second and Third Evangelists wherever St. Mark and St. Luke are mentioned. Such abbreviations as Mt., Mk., Lk., Jn. are always meant to refer to the Gospels, not to their authors.

It only remains for the writer to express his deep sense of gratitude to those to whose knowledge and help he is debtor. How much he owes to earlier workers in the field will be sufficiently evident. It has proved by no means an easy task to weigh and to differentiate between opposing views, and the writer is not unmindful of his temerity, in certain places, in dissenting from opinions supported by justly honoured names.

He desires particularly to speak of the generous encouragement he received in his task from the late Dr. Sanday. Dr. Sanday had made a provisional promise to write a brief introduction to the present work. His lamented death has prevented the carrying out of this promise, and for the lack of such an introduction the book is so much the poorer.

The writer further wishes to express his gratitude to his former tutor, the Rev. Prof. A. S. Geden, M.A., D.D., and to the Rev. J. Walthew Simister, for their kindness in reading the typescript, and in suggesting improvements, and also to the Rev. Prof. F. Bertram Clogg, M.A., for his valued assistance in the reading of the proof-sheets.

VINCENT TAYLOR.

BATH, *September*, 1920.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DCG.	Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (1906–8).
EB.	*Encyclopaedia Biblica* (1899–1903).
Evan. Da-Meph. .	F. C. Burkitt's *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe* (1904).
GHD.	V. H. Stanton's *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, Parts I and II (1903–9).
GHT.	F. C. Burkitt's *The Gospel History and its Transmission* (1906).
Gr. ii.	J. H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Vol. II (1919).
HDB.	Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1898–1904).
HJ.	*The Hibbert Journal.*
HS.	*Horae Synopticae*, Sir John C. Hawkins (2nd ed., 1909).
ICC.	*The International Critical Commentary.*
INT.	Jülicher's *Introduction to the New Testament*, Eng. Tr. (1904); J. Moffatt's *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (3rd ed., 1918).
Proleg.	Vol. I of J. H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* (3rd ed., 1908).
SH.	Sanday and Headlam's Commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC., 1895).
Th-Gr.	Thayer-Grimm's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1905).
VGT.	Moulton and Milligan's *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Parts I to III (1914–18).

CHAPTER I

THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE NEW TESTAMENT OUTSIDE THE FIRST AND THIRD GOSPELS

OUTSIDE the First and Third Gospels there is no direct reference to the Virgin Birth in the New Testament. There are passages which have been said to imply a knowledge of the doctrine, but, for particularity of statement, none of them can be compared with Mt. i. 18–25 and Lk. i. 34 f. This fact must be our justification in the present chapter for treating together the New Testament Books outside these two Gospels.

The inquiry is mainly a study in silence; it is for that reason both difficult and complicated.

Dr. Sanday has expressed considerable distrust in the argument from silence (cf. *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 33–41). He quotes a striking passage from Dr. Drummond's *Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (p. 157 f.), in which reference is made to Theophilus of Antioch, who, in a defence of Christianity, relates nothing about Christ Himself, and maintains a remarkable silence concerning the Gospels. The quotation ends with the words: 'We may learn from these curious facts that it is not correct to say that a writer knows nothing of certain things, simply because he had not occasion to refer to them in his only extant writing: or even because he does not mention them when his subject would seem naturally to lead him to do so.' Dr. Sanday has two main objections to the way in which the argument from silence is often handled. '(1) The critic does not ask himself *what* is silent—what extent of material . . . And (2) experience shows that the argument is often most fallacious' (op. cit., p. 35).

Nothing can be lost in considering this opinion at the outset of our inquiry. In the connexion in which it is urged, it has very great justification. Dr. Sanday is referring to the paucity of references to the Gospels in the second century previous to

170 A.D. The real question is, he says, 'What is the relation which the extant evidence bears to the whole body of that which once existed, and how far can we trust the inferences drawn from it?' The available literature is confessedly small. 'If we take the whole extant Christian literature between the years 130 and 170 A.D., it would not fill more than a thin octavo volume, and by far the greater part of that is taken up with external controversy' (ib., p. 39).

The caution suggested by these words is distinctly healthy. It may be questioned, however, whether Dr. Sanday's point of view would apply quite so well as regards the alleged silence of so many New Testament Books with reference to the Virgin Birth. There are good reasons for this opinion.

(1) The existing New Testament Writings represent the best Christian literature of the period which they cover. No one would compare them in this respect with the extant works of the first seven decades of the second century.

(2) While not exhaustive in their treatment, the Gospels are faithful to the outstanding events in the life of Jesus.

(3) The Epistles are rich in doctrinal teaching. Occasional in point of origin, they impinge again and again upon the great doctrines of the Christian Faith. The Incarnation and the Person of Christ especially are central.

If, then, very many New Testament Writings are found to be silent as regards the Virgin Birth, the silence is not one which can be ignored. It may in part be explained, but it must not be explained away. If it exists, it is not a silence which can be regarded with equanimity; it must be significant, and no pains can be spared in trying to understand that significance.

We believe, then, that the *argumentum ex silentio* has a valid place in our inquiry. All the more, therefore, must we consider what the possibilities of silence are. Obviously, silence may be consistent with knowledge of a fact or lack of knowledge. But that is not all. If it implies knowledge, it may mean tacit acceptance of the fact, tacit rejection, or comparative indifference. Lack of knowledge, on the other hand, may be explained by special circumstances, or by the view that the alleged fact is untrue.

In treating the New Testament Books outside the First and

Third Gospels, our first task must be to determine whether their silence is complete. Where this is the case, we have to try, so far as we can, to interpret the silence. Each stage is, however, a further step into the unknown, and must therefore be taken with increasing care and caution.

I.

We begin with ST. PAUL, the earliest New Testament writer, and the author of ten, if not thirteen, Epistles. Several passages have been quoted from his writings, in support of the view that the Virgin Birth tradition was known to him. Among these are Gal. iv. 4, Rom. i. 3, and passages in which St. Paul speaks of Christ as the Second Adam, notably Rom. v. 12–15 and 1 Cor. xv. 47.

Gal. iv. 4 f. reads as follows : *But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* It is most improbable that there is here any reference to the Virgin Birth, or even any indication that the doctrine is known to St. Paul. The phrase '*born of a woman*' is one that is used naturally of an ordinary human birth (cf. Job xiv. 1 ; and Mt. xi. 11 (Lk. vii. 28) 'among them that are born of women'). The determining consideration is, however, the argument of Gal. iv. 1–7. St. Paul is there working out the figure of the heir who is yet a minor (verses 1, 2). While we were children, he argues, we were in bondage (verse 3). But, when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son to redeem men from the law. To accomplish this purpose, the Son must needs make Himself one with those He came to deliver. Like them He must be 'born under the law' ; like them He must be 'born of a woman'. The one clause asserts His position as a child of the Jewish race ; the other declares the reality of His humanity. There is not the slightest suggestion of a miraculous birth.[1] Indeed, the more natural impression

[1] Dr. Orr (*The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 1907, 3rd ed., 1914) says that in every Pauline reference to the origin of Christ there is 'some peculiarity of expression' (pp. 117 ff., 196). He instances γενόμενος in Gal. iv. 4, Rom. i. 3, Phil. ii. 7, and speaks of γεννητός as the word properly denoting 'born'. But St. Paul never uses γεννητός, and Mt. xi. 11 and Lk. vii. 28 are the only

made by the words is that of a birth common to all the sons of men. If St. Paul had wished to avoid giving that impression, he could have done so with ease, since he was perfectly familiar with the distinction between γυνή (woman) and παρθένος (virgin) (cf. 1 Cor. vii. 34).

Rom. i. 3 f. reads: '. . . *his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead.*' Here the thought of the Virgin Birth is said to lie implicit in the opening words of the passage (cf. Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 119 ff.; also Knowling, *Testimony of St. Paul to Christ*, p. 313; and Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, p. 237 n.). Again, the exegesis cannot be allowed. St. Paul's words state an antithesis; they speak of the Son from two standpoints, that of the body and that of the spirit (SH., Rom., p. 7). 'According to the flesh', He was 'born (γενομένου) of the seed of David', but, 'according to the spirit of holiness', He was designated (ὁρισθέντος) Son of God 'by the resurrection of the dead'. It is very difficult to think that the antithesis would have been stated in this way, if the Apostle had been thinking of the Virgin Birth. 'Born of the seed of David' contains no reference to the doctrine. The Divine Sonship, indeed, is not mentioned until the following clause, and there it is said to be predicated, not in the Virgin Birth, but in the Resurrection. Without pressing the view that 'according to the flesh born of the seed of David' implies an ordinary human birth, we may certainly claim that the Miraculous Conception is a thought entirely foreign to the passage.

A further implication of the doctrine has been found in St. Paul's thought of *the Second Adam* (Rom. v. 12–21, 1 Cor.

instances in the NT. Moreover, the papyri show that γίνομαι and γενόμενος were in common use in the sense of 'to come into being', 'be born' (cf. Moulton and Milligan, VGT., 1915, p. 126 a). Canon Box also speaks of St. Paul's use of 'the out-of-the-way γενόμενον' (*The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, 1916). 'This would harmonise', he says, 'with the feeling that there was something extraordinary and supernatural about the birth, which led to its being spoken of in unusual terms' (p. 149 n.). Not to speak of the papyri, what would these writers make of Jn. viii. 58, 'Before Abraham was (πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι) I am'? Was there 'something extraordinary' in Abraham's birth too? For a view similar to that of Orr and Box see Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, p. 237 f.

xv. 44–9). In *Dissertations* (new ed., p. 11), Dr. Gore writes: 'What we can maintain, with great boldness, is that St. Paul's conception of the "Second Adam" postulates His miraculous birth' (cf. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, p. 150). In a question of this kind, we must distinguish between what the doctrine of the 'Second Adam' may or may not 'postulate' in our own minds, and what St. Paul's thoughts may have been. Certainly he gives us no reason to suppose that the Virgin Birth was in the background of his mind when he wrote Rom. v. 12–21.[1] There would be as much justification, if not more, for the contrary suggestion. So far as 1 Cor. xv. 44–9 is concerned—(verse 47 reads: '*The second man is of heaven*')—the reference is to the Resurrection, not the Incarnation.[2]

None of these passages is sufficient to show that St. Paul was acquainted with the Virgin Birth tradition, nor can any others be cited. This fact is the more remarkable when we call to mind the great Pauline passages which bear upon the Incarnation. With the closest scrutiny, not one of them gives us reason to think that the Apostle knew of the Virgin Birth. This is true of the great Christological passage of Phil. ii. 5–11, and also of the well-known words of 2 Cor. viii. 9. Most significant in this connexion are Phil. ii. 7 ('*Being made in the likeness of man*') and Rom. viii. 3 (which speaks of the Son as sent '*in the likeness of sinful flesh*'). These passages are important because they clearly imply a difference between the humanity of Christ and ordinary humanity. This difference—indicated by the word 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα)—is certainly not a difference in mode of origin. Its character is manifest in Rom. viii. 3; it lies in the sinlessness and moral perfection of Jesus.[3] There is no indication that the Apostle is thinking of anything further, and the

[1] Compare verse 12, 'as through one man', with verse 15, 'the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ'. Cf. also Rom. ix. 5 (and 1 Tim. ii. 5).

[2] Cf. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 69: '... the passage [1 Cor. xv. 44–9] is throughout concerned not in the least with the pre-existent but with the exalted Christ. It was only in virtue of resurrection that He became the archetype and head of a new race.' Mackintosh says that the Virgin Birth is 'not present' in Gal. iv. 4, 'not even hinted at' (p. 528).

[3] 'The flesh of Christ is "like" ours inasmuch as it is flesh; "like", and only "like", because it is not sinful: *ostendit nos quidem habere carnem peccati, Filium vero Dei similitudinem habuisse carnis peccati, non carnem peccati* (Orig.-lat.)' (SH., ICC., Rom., p. 193).

same is true of Phil. ii. 7. Viewing the passages as a whole, we must conclude that, not only is St. Paul completely silent as to the Virgin Birth, but that he is silent just where his silence is most difficult to understand, if he knew of the tradition.

Can we go further, and say that St. Paul did not know of the doctrine? Short of a hard and fast conclusion, we are at liberty to state what would seem to be the probabilities of the case; and as regards these we can have little hesitation. It is reasonable to urge that St. Paul would have phrased his references to the Incarnation somewhat differently, if he had known of the Virgin Birth, and that, on the whole, his words are best explained by presuming his ignorance of the tradition.

W. C. Allen has suggested that St. Paul's silence may have been due to reasons of prudence. He may have thought that the tradition would prove 'a great stumbling-block to the progress of Christianity, and a continual source of wounded feeling for the reverence of Christians for the Person of their Master' (ICC., St. Mt., p. 20). It is possible that this argument might go some way to explain the absence of direct allusions to the Virgin Birth in St. Paul's writings. It might cover his failure to employ the tradition as 'an argument for Christianity in his preaching to the Gentiles'. But, assuredly, the theory is stretched to breaking-point, if it is made to cover the absence of the slightest indication that the doctrine was present to St. Paul's mind. For the most part, St. Paul's Epistles were not public manifestoes, but private letters, written to Christian communities. Moreover, they are intensely self-revealing. They permit us to appreciate how much St. Paul knew of the words and deeds of Jesus, and of the events of His earthly life. That they reveal no knowledge of the Virgin Birth is hardly to be explained by a policy of silence. Unless, on other grounds, it can be shown that the tradition was known in Apostolic circles during St. Paul's lifetime, his silence must be interpreted to mean lack of knowledge concerning it.

This conclusion, if established, would not, of course, be fatal to the historical value of the Virgin Birth tradition. Special reasons might be forthcoming to account for the later spread of the belief. The importance of St. Paul's silence is that it furnishes help in deciding when the belief became current.

A further inference, of considerable theological importance, is that the Apostle could build up a mature and consistent Christology, without any reference to, and apparently, thought of the Miraculous Conception.

II.

Q (Quelle, 'source') is the symbol used to denote the main documentary source, upon which the First and Third Evangelists drew, in addition to St. Mark's Gospel. As regards its character, there is difference of opinion. Some scholars identify it with the Matthaean Logia of which Papias speaks; others regard the latter as an independent collection of Messianic proof-texts. By some it is thought to have been a Gospel; by others it is looked upon as a collection of the Sayings of Jesus, with a certain element of narrative. Wellhausen dates it later than Mk., but most scholars think that it is earlier, and date it from the sixties and in some cases from the fifties.[1]

As regards the Virgin Birth, it is almost certain that Q did not contain the tradition. Harnack thinks that Q's narrative of the Baptism, with its use of Ps. ii. 7, 'excludes all ideas of pre-existence and miraculous birth' (*Sayings of Jesus*, p. 235), and J. M. Thompson, who quotes this opinion, finds in the Baptist's question, 'Art thou he that cometh?',[2] a passage which it is 'hard to reconcile . . . with Lk.'s story of the Birth, as generally interpreted' (*Miracles*, p. 140). What is more important than either of these arguments, is the fact that neither the First nor the Third Evangelist drew a Virgin Birth tradition from Q. The presumption is that Q was silent as regards the Virgin Birth,[3] but in view of the fact that it probably contained only a small element of narrative, we ought not to say more.[4]

[1] For these and other details see Moffatt, INT., pp. 194–206; also Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 229–52.

[2] Cf. Mt. xi. 2 f. = Lk. vii. 18 f.

[3] Cf. Mackintosh, *Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 528.

[4] Mr. Thompson thinks that in Q 'we are dealing with an age that has not yet begun to think of the Virgin Birth' (ib., p. 140). This may be true, but it is not a legitimate inference to draw from Q alone.

III.

In treating ST. MARK'S GOSPEL, our first task is to ask if its silence is complete. This leads at once to a discussion of Mk. vi. 3: '*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary . . .?*'

Parentage among the Jews was traced on the father's side. The passage may therefore imply that Joseph was already dead. Archdeacon Allen thinks that 'son of Mary' is 'more naturally an allusion to the supernatural circumstances of the birth of Jesus' (ICC., St. Mt., p. 156).[1] Without going so far as this, Canon Box thinks that there is something 'decidedly remarkable and unusual' in the phrase, and suggests that it is probably contemptuous (op. cit., p. 139).

However we explain the phrase, we ought not to interpret Mk. vi. 3 as implying a knowledge of the Virgin Birth on the part of the people of Nazareth. Mt. xiii. 55 and Lk. iv. 22 directly exclude this view.[2] 'Who would allude to the miraculous birth of somebody *as a reason for not believing in him*?' (Thompson, ib., p. 138 n.).

But did the Evangelist know of the Virgin Birth? Has a knowledge of the doctrine shaped his phrasing in Mk. vi. 3? The question is complicated by critical considerations. It is suggested by several scholars that the passage, in whole or in part, is a later addition to the Second Gospel.[3] There is much to be said for this view, but, so far as our immediate purpose is concerned, we have no need to discuss it in detail. On either view—that of the critical theory just mentioned, or that which attributes the passage to the Evangelist—it is improbable that St. Mark intended to refer to the Virgin Birth, or was influenced by the doctrine. On the interpolation-hypothesis, this is obvious enough, but it is also true if Mk. vi. 3 is original. The suggestions that Joseph was already dead, and that a certain con-

[1] Cf. Plummer, ICC., St. Lk., p. 125.

[2] Mt. xiii. 55: 'Is not this the carpenter's son? . . .' Lk. iv. 22: 'Is not this Joseph's son?'

[3] So Wendland and Bacon (Moffatt, INT., p. 227 f.); Stanton, GHD., ii. 142. Mt. xiii. 55 reads: 'Is not this the carpenter's son?', and Lk. iv. 22: 'Is not this Joseph's son?' The argument is that it is very difficult to think that the later Evangelists can have read what is now Mk. vi. 3 in the Markan Source.

tempt breathes in the words, have great force. We may also note that the passage goes on to refer to the brothers and sisters of Jesus, with no suggestion that the relationship was other than full and complete. But what is most telling of all is the fact that, if Mk. vi. 3 does imply St. Mark's knowledge of the Virgin Birth, both St. 'Matthew' and St. Luke, in their own narratives, have destroyed the reference. This is all the more remarkable if the First Evangelist's treatment of Mk. vi. 3 is motived by reverence for the Person of Jesus.[1] Finally, can we suppose that St. Mark would have placed his sole reference to the Virgin Birth in the lips of unbelieving Jews who speak with thinly veiled contempt? For these reasons, we find it impossible to discover in Mk. vi. 3 a reference to the Virgin Birth by St. Mark; the Evangelist's silence is unbroken.

Was, then, the tradition unknown to St. Mark?

Several passages have been cited in support of the contention that St. Mark had no knowledge of the doctrine. Among these is Mk. iii. 21, 31–5 (cf. Mt. xii. 46–50; Lk. viii. 19–21). The story of Mk. iii. 31–5 is that of the coming of Mary and of the brothers of Jesus, while our Lord is surrounded by a crowd, apparently in a house. When Jesus is informed that they are without seeking Him, He says, 'Who is my mother and my brethren?', and looking round upon the assembled company, He continues, 'Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother'. The account in Mt. is almost identical, and St. Luke's story, while much briefer, is substantially the same. But St. Mark's narrative must be read in the light of Mk. iii. 21 (cf. Gould, ICC., St. Mk., pp. 61, 67)—a passage which is omitted in Mt. and in Lk. There, we are told that the friends of Jesus (*οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ*, probably 'His kinsmen') went out to lay hold on Him, in the belief that He was mad. This fact must unquestionably be held to explain the action of the family of Jesus in the incident of Mk. iii. 31–5, and the question arises, Did Mary share in the fears and intentions of the rest?[2]

[1] 'Mt. has substituted "the Son of the Carpenter" for "the Carpenter" from a feeling that the latter was hardly a phrase of due reverence' (Allen, op. cit., p. 155).

[2] Both Schmiedel (EB., 2954 f.) and Usener (EB., 3345) hold that the incident excludes the Virgin Birth. In reference to the words of Jesus,

A second passage is Mk. vi. 4, where Jesus declares that a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. The phrase '*among his own kin*', which both Mt. (xiii. 57) and Lk. (iv. 24) omit, is said to point in the same direction as Mk. iii. 21, 31–5.[1] A third incident adduced is that recorded in Mk. xii. 35–7 (Mt. xxii. 41–6; Lk. xx. 41–4), where Jesus raises the question, how the Messiah can be at once David's Son and David's Lord. 'Here again', writes Mr. Thompson, 'Jesus assumes the reality of that human parentage on which His Davidic descent relies. . . . Thus it appears that on three separate occasions (and there are no others) when Jesus, according to the earliest Gospel, spoke about His birth, He used language naturally compatible with human parentage, and not naturally compatible with anything else' (op. cit., p. 138).

It will be seen that these passages raise more than the question whether St. Mark knew of the Virgin Birth. They raise the question of the knowledge of Jesus, and indeed the whole question of the historical character of the Miraculous Conception.

Clearly, the question of the knowledge of Jesus is a determinative consideration. Few indeed will care to argue for the Virgin Birth tradition, if it can be proved that Jesus knew nothing of it, but believed Himself to be the son of Joseph. Just for this very reason we ought to be scrupulously careful in treating the question. A scientific inquiry will hesitate to draw an inference which makes further research superfluous. And in the present case hesitation is amply justified. We cannot share Mr. Thompson's conviction that the words of Jesus acknowledge a natural parentage. (1) Such exegesis must suffer an obvious discount if we find that the *Evangelist* knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. (2) We cannot be certain that Mary shared the fears and intentions of her children. (3) We do not know the tone in which Jesus spoke, nor can we be sure that He intended to repudiate His family. It may be so; but our opinion on these matters

J. M. Thompson says: 'The force of His aphorism about spiritual kinship depends on the reality of the human kinship which He at once acknowledges and rejects' (op. cit., p. 137).

[1] So Schmiedel (op. cit., col. 2955). Thompson thinks that the story of Mk. vi. 1–6 'could not possibly have been told as it has been, if the narrator had known anything about the Virgin Birth' (op. cit., p. 138).

must rest upon what we believe about the Virgin Birth; the evidence is too uncertain to reverse the process.

As regards the Evangelist, we may say at once that we could account much more easily for the passages cited, if St. Mark did not know of the doctrine. But it is doubtful if we can say more, so long as we confine ourselves to what St. Mark has actually written.

There is little difficulty in the third passage (Mk. xii. 35–7), since both Mt. and Lk. repeat it without material variation. Nor is there the force claimed in the phrase 'among his own kin' (Mk. vi. 4). In any case Mt. has the words 'in his own house', and probably the omission of the former phrase is sufficiently explained by the writer's tendency to remove redundant expressions in Mk.[1] While in the case of St. Luke, we have to remember that abbreviation is a common feature in his use of Markan material.

The real difficulty lies in Mk. iii. 21, 31–5. Something more than a desire for brevity must account for the later Evangelists' treatment of this story. Mary's position and attitude are certainly left very ambiguous in the light of Mk. iii. 21. In the subsequent story St. Mark does not distinguish her from the rest (iii. 31–5). In short, he leaves her open to the charge of having thought her Son distraught and in need of restraint. Ought we to find in this, proof that St. Mark had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth? Our hesitation in drawing this conclusion arises out of the 'objectivity' of St. Mark's writing. Frequently, he does not hesitate to introduce details, to which, for various reasons, St. 'Matthew' and St. Luke took exception. He does not appear to feel the difficulties which the later writers felt. We could not, therefore, attach the same significance to an 'inconsistency' in Mk., as in Lk., or in Mt. For this reason, we think that, while Mk. iii. 21, 31–5 raises very great difficulties, the passage is not sufficient in itself to prove that St. Mark knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. We may say that the passage points in this direction, but that the inference requires further confirmation. Can this be found? We believe that it can be found in the broad fact of St. Mark's silence.

[1] Cf. Allen, ICC., St. Mt., p. xxiv (c) (i), where fifty examples of this tendency are given.

There is much greater significance in St. Mark's silence than is sometimes allowed. Why should he, as an Evangelist, remain silent about the Virgin Birth, if he knew of it, and believed in it? The deep interest which he takes in the descent of the Spirit at the Baptism, and his evident intention to describe this event as a crucial moment in the life of Jesus, set up a strong presumption that, had he known of the Miraculous Conception, he would have introduced it into his narrative. There is no sufficient analogy in his silence about other events in the life of Jesus which later writers record; no omission can be compared with this. Nor will reasons of prudence account for his silence; the Second Gospel is probably too late for this argument to have weight. There is still less force in the suggestion that St. Mark's intention was to describe only the public ministry of Jesus. This solution evades the difficulty, and comes perilously near to saying that St. Mark does not record the Virgin Birth tradition because he does not record it! The Second Gospel describes not only the death and burial of Jesus, but also the visit of the women to the tomb, and probably, in its original ending, some of the Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus. These facts are enough to show how inadequate it would be to describe the Gospel as an account of the public ministry of Jesus.

Having regard to all the facts of the case, the probability is that St. Mark's silence must be explained on the ground that the Evangelist had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth tradition. The further implication is that it formed no part of Apostolic preaching, and was unknown in the circles in which St. Mark moved. These conclusions cannot, of course, be hardened into certainties; they move in the realms of what is probable. Instead of being capable of refuting other considerations which might arise, they themselves require further confirmation.

IV.

There is no reference to the Virgin Birth, either direct or indirect, in THE ACTS. The presumption is that the doctrine had no place in Apostolic preaching.[1] This view is suggested,

[1] 'The speeches in the earlier part may represent not untrustworthily the

not only by the silence of Acts, but also by the character of its Christology.

Christ is spoken of as Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by mighty works and wonders and signs (ii. 22), and as one who was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, and with power, who went about doing good (x. 38). He is the Holy and Righteous One (iii. 14), the Prince of Life (iii. 15), whom God made both Lord and Christ (ii. 36). He is exalted to the right hand of God, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins (v. 31).

In all this, the main ground of appeal is to the Resurrection (ii. 24, 32, iii. 15, iv. 10).[1] The reference to the miracles of Jesus (ii. 22, x. 38) is 'the only direct and concrete allusion to the events of His earthly life'.[2] Even where the Davidic descent is mentioned (ii. 25 f., xiii. 23, 33), there is no suggestion other than that of direct physical lineage ('Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus', xiii. 23).

Does the silence of Acts permit us to draw any inferences concerning St. Luke's knowledge of the Virgin Birth tradition? The question ought to be considered apart altogether from Lk. i, ii. Having regard to the character of the work we do not think that any one conclusion can safely be drawn. The Acts obviously differs from the Gospels, and we cannot, as in the case of the Pauline Epistles, look to it for any sufficient account of the writer's Christology. It would therefore be unsafe to say that the silence of Acts implies that its author had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth.[3] If the doctrine was not a subject of Apostolic preaching, St. Luke must have known this: his silence may therefore be due to a sound historical sense. If, at the time when he wrote the Acts, his knowledge of the tradition had not long been gained, he would be still less likely to perpetrate what would have been an historical anachronism. On the other hand, we cannot, on the evidence of the Acts

primitive Jewish-Christian preaching of the period' (Moffatt, INT., p. 305). Cf. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 39.

[1] Mackintosh, ib., p. 40 f. 'What absorbs the preacher is Jesus' deliverance from the grave and entry into glory', p. 41.

[2] Mackintosh, ib., p. 41.

[3] For the opposite view see Thompson, op. cit., p. 142.

alone, show that he did know of the doctrine, and that the possibilities just stated represent the facts. The case is one in which the *argumentum ex silentio* would be untrustworthy in either direction. It should be emphasized that this view springs entirely out of the character of the book, and in no way affects the use of the argument we have made in the case of Mk. and the Epistles of St. Paul.

V.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS claims attention because of the developed character of its doctrine of the Person of Christ, and because its writer, while not an eye-witness (ii. 3), has a vivid knowledge of many events in the earthly life of Jesus. As regards the Virgin Birth, the Epistle is completely silent. In the comparison with Melchizedek (vii. 1–3), no stress can be laid on the fact that the latter is described as 'without father'; he is also 'without mother' and 'without genealogy'. The reference to the descent of Jesus from the tribe of Judah (vii. 14) is left quite bare. Even the statements concerning the sinlessness of Christ (iv. 15, vii. 26), and the lofty characterization of the Son as 'the effulgence' of God's glory and 'the very impress of his substance' (i. 3), are made without a word as to the method of the Incarnation. It is difficult to read the Epistle without feeling that the writer's thought is nowhere influenced by the Virgin Birth. Especially is this the case in such passages as ii. 14 ('*Since then the children are sharers* (κεκοινώνηκεν) *in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of* (μετέσχεν) *the same*'),[1] and ii. 17 ('*It behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren*'). Two considerations forbid, however, the drawing of this conclusion. We have no certain knowledge of the writer's identity, and we have no other work from his pen with which to compare the Epistle. Its significance is therefore mainly theological; it is an instance of an elaborate

[1] It is true different verbs and tenses are used of the children and of the Son. The tense of μετέσχεν is explained by the fact that the Son assumed flesh and blood at a definite time now past. The change of verb—so far as it is not explained on stylistic grounds—is due to the fact that κεκοινώνηκεν (of the children) expresses the universal fact of human frailty which men share one with another, and μετέσχεν the individual entering upon this state. The latter word does not imply a participation of a peculiar and distinct kind.

doctrinal writing,[1] coming possibly from the seventh decade of the first century, or, more probably, from about the year 80 A.D., in which no reference of any kind is made to the Miraculous Conception. This fact, however it is explained, cannot be ignored, and the later we date the Epistle the more important it becomes.

VI.

The silence of THE FOURTH GOSPEL regarding the Virgin Birth is now generally admitted;[2] the only question being whether there is not a passing reference to the doctrine in Jn. i. 13.[3]

What the writer's silence means is one of the most difficult problems in the question of the Virgin Birth. The case is different from any we have yet considered. For the doctrine of the Virgin Birth must have been perfectly well known to the Fourth Evangelist. He was well acquainted with the Synoptic Gospels,[4] and there can be little doubt but that he read Lk. i, ii,

[1] 'In point of time, the Epistle to the Hebrews is the first systematic sketch of Christian theology' (Mackintosh, *Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 78). 'It is not so much an epistle as an elaborate treatise' (Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 320).

[2] 'Few would say, with Westcott, that virgin-birth is implied though not explicitly asserted in Jn. i. 14. . . .' (Mackintosh, ib., p. 528).

[3] The view that i. 13 should be read 'Who was born, &c.', is that of Resch, Blass, and Th. Zahn. The reading appears in Tertullian, Irenaeus, Justin, but the weight of textual authority is against it. Nor is the reading, as representing what the Evangelist wrote, intrinsically probable. It would rule out the maternity of Mary as well as the paternity of Joseph. The birth would not only be not 'of the will of man'; it would not even be 'of blood'. There would be nothing human about it; from first to last it would be 'of God'. In short, the reading leads directly to that docetic view of the Person of Christ, against which the Johannine Writings so earnestly contend. The same objection may be urged against the view that, in the accepted text of Jn. i. 13, the Virgin Birth is present to the writer's mind 'as a kind of pattern or model of the birth of the children of God' (W. C. Allen, *Interpreter*, Oct., 1905. Cf. Orr, op. cit., p. 111 f.; Box, op. cit., p. 145). Would not the Fourth Evangelist have regarded such a comparison as almost a denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh? Harnack has recently contended for the singular and for a reference to the Virgin Birth. He thinks that the verse was added in the margin, as a comment on i. 14, at a very early time and in the Johannine circle (Peake, *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 747 a).

[4] Cf. Sanday, op. cit., pp. 71, 143–55; Moffatt, INT., pp. 533 ff.; E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel, Its Purpose and Theology*, pp. 32 ff.; Jülicher, INT., p. 396 f.

and Mt. i, ii, in the form in which we have them to-day. That he knew of the tradition is further confirmed by the fact that, so early probably as *c.* 110 A.D., the Epistles of Ignatius contain several references to the doctrine (Eph. xviii. 2; xix. 1; Magn. 11; Tr. ix). The difficulty is further increased by the freedom with which the Evangelist treats the Synoptics. 'On the one hand their contents are very largely assumed; and on the other hand the author does not hesitate, where he thinks it necessary, to correct them. . . . The author evidently felt himself at liberty to select just those incidents which suited his purpose' (Sanday, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 71).

As the problem is usually treated, the silence of the Fourth Gospel is said to mean either 'tacit rejection' or 'tacit acceptance of the tradition. It may be questioned, however, if these alternatives sufficiently cover the possibilities of the case. 'Tacit rejection' under any circumstances means repudiation of the doctrine. But 'tacit acceptance' may mean anything from comparative indifference to whole-hearted assent.

As containing the sharper issue, the case for 'tacit rejection' may be considered first. Among the arguments in favour of this view, we may note the following:—

(1) Certain passages seem to require this position. In i. 45 Jesus is described by Philip as '*the son of Joseph*', and in vi. 42 the Jews at Capernaum ask the question: '*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*' Three times, moreover, controversy turns on the question of the birthplace of Jesus. The Jews look for the birthplace of the Messiah at Bethlehem ('Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem?', vii. 42), or they regard it as unknown ('When the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence he is', vii. 27), and the objection is raised that Jesus is of Galilee (i. 45, vii. 41 f., 52). Nowhere does the Evangelist expose the futility of the controversy by a reference to Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. On the contrary (it is said), he himself believed Nazareth to be the birthplace, and must thus have rejected the tradition of Mt. i, ii.

(2) Instead of directly repudiating a particular Synoptic narrative, the Fourth Evangelist's method is silently to set it aside by preferring another tradition or view. Is not his

preference for his own Incarnation theory a tacit repudiation of the Virgin Birth tradition?

Of these arguments the second can be allowed only if we can show that the Evangelist looked upon the two doctrines, that of the Virgin Birth and that of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, as contradictory and mutually exclusive. It is not possible, however, to prove this, and to assume it is to beg the question. The stronger argument is the first. It is certainly difficult to show that the language of i. 45 and vi. 42 is that of Philip and the Jews respectively, and that it does not reflect the Evangelist's point of view. In the Fourth Gospel we are often unable to assume that the writer intends to give the *ipsissima verba* of those who speak. Are i. 45 and vi. 42 cases in point, or are they exceptions? The question is not an easy one to decide, unless, of course, we have satisfied ourselves that the Fourth Gospel is an entirely unhistorical work. In this case, i. 45 and vi. 42 will represent the Evangelist's opinions. But, on this view, we have largely forfeited our right to appeal to the Fourth Gospel in treating the question of the Virgin Birth on its historical side. We cannot have it both ways. If the Fourth Gospel shows a pronounced disregard of history, it is not permissible to draw historical arguments from it. It will have (on this view) an important bearing on the historical question from the theological side; but, as a primary historical authority, it must disappear. If, on the other hand, we admit—as we have good reason to admit—the presence of a considerable element of valuable historical tradition in the Fourth Gospel, it is by no means certain that i. 45 and vi. 42 represent the Evangelist's views. As in the case of Mt. xiii. 55 and Lk. iv. 22, these passages may indicate contemporary opinions and no more. This view is less easy to hold in the case of i. 45 and vi. 42 than it is in respect of the Synoptic passages; but it is a possibility not lightly to be set aside. And if this is so, we cannot with confidence urge that in i. 45 and vi. 42 the Fourth Evangelist repudiates the Virgin Birth.

As regards the passages which connect Jesus with Nazareth and Galilee, it is not necessary to infer that the writer looked upon the town as the birthplace of our Lord. His silence regarding Bethlehem is strange, but it does not compel us to

conclude that he is rejecting the tradition bound up with Mt. i, ii, as Mr. Thompson thinks (op. cit., p. 158).[1] The more important fact is that the Evangelist does not name *any town*, not even Nazareth, as the birthplace of the Eternal Word.

The view that the Fourth Evangelist tacitly rejects the Virgin Birth fails to justify itself on internal grounds. It is also opposed by considerations of an *external* character. It is from the locality in which probably the Fourth Gospel arose, that we have the earliest references to the Virgin Birth outside the New Testament. Ignatius, according to Dr. Moffatt (INT., p. 211), seems 'to fuse the Johannine idea of the incarnation with the synoptic birth-stories'. If this is so, the fact does not compel us to suppose that the Fourth Evangelist would have done the same; but it raises a strong presumption against the view that he explicitly rejected the tradition.

Must we then suppose that the Evangelist's silence means 'tacit acceptance' of the doctrine? Obviously, the failure to prove 'tacit rejection' tells so far in the opposite direction. But, as we have seen, 'tacit acceptance' is a very elastic term; it calls, therefore, for closer consideration.

It can scarcely be shown that the Fourth Evangelist accepts the Virgin Birth in the same way in which it is held in Mt. i, ii. There is no sufficient answer to this assertion in the plea that the story had been already told, and that the Evangelist's purpose was to supplement the Synoptic narratives. This is a view of the Fourth Gospel which cannot be carried through. It is better to suppose that the Evangelist's omission of the Virgin Birth tradition has a more definite meaning, even though we reject the view that its significance is silent repudiation of the doctrine. We have also to find a place in our solution of the problem for the difficulties left over in i. 45 and vi. 42, and in the Evangelist's failure to name the birthplace of Jesus. In other words, arguments insufficient to prove 'tacit rejection' cannot on that account be ignored. They must rather be held to condition the sense in which we speak of 'tacit acceptance'.

[1] iv. 44 ('For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country'), unless it is a gloss, probably refers to Judaea, not Galilee. Cf. Moffatt, INT., p. 553. Mr. Thompson argues that it refers to Galilee (op. cit., p. 158).

The Evangelist's silence regarding the Virgin Birth can only be understood when it is considered along with his other notable 'omissions'. It is one of 'a whole series of episodes, cardinal to the Synoptic story' (Scott, *Fourth Gospel*, p. 42). This series includes the Genealogy, the Virgin Birth, the Baptism, the Temptation, the Transfiguration, the Supper, the Agony, the Ascension. The true explanation is probably that given by Dr. E. F. Scott: 'These remarkable omissions . . . cannot be due to oversight or to the leaving out of what was non-essential. Without doubt they have been made deliberately, in view of certain theories and presuppositions with which the writer approached his subject' (ib., p. 42 f.). These words set us on the right track. The Evangelist's silence does not mean that he rejected the Virgin Birth tradition. The Synoptic birth-stories were more probably accepted by him 'as a part of the orthodox tradition, in which, as a member of the Church, he acquiesced' (ib., p. 188). His doctrinal sympathies, however, lay in another direction. It may be that at the time when he first heard of the Virgin Birth tradition, his doctrine of the Incarnate Word had already shaped itself in his mind. Jesus Christ was the Eternal Son of God, the Word made flesh, who became incarnate by His own voluntary act. The fact that his own theological scheme was already developed, together with its specific character,[1] may well account for his neglect of the Virgin Birth. *He does not deny the story, but his own Christology has superior spiritual attractions.*

It will be seen that this theory leaves little room for difficulties arising from such passages as i. 45 and vi. 42, and explains at once the Evangelist's attitude to the question of the birthplace of Jesus. On the one hand, the doctrinal presuppositions of the Virgin Birth were not operative in his mind; on the other hand, in the light of his doctrine of the Logos, the difficulties mentioned would scarcely be felt. The Jewish controversies must have seemed to him so much playing with words. What did it matter

[1] 'In order to explain his silence, we must remember his strict exclusion of all that might imply a passivity in the divine Logos. It was by His own free act that the Son of God entered the world as man. The evangelist shrank from any theory of His origin that might impair the central idea of full activity, from the beginning of His work to the end' (Scott, ib., p. 187).

where the Word became flesh? What did it matter if men called Him Joseph's son?

Our conclusion, then, is that the Fourth Evangelist tacitly accepts the Virgin Birth, but gives it no place in his doctrinal system. With the theological significance of this result we are not now concerned. Our present interest is rather in its historical implications. On the positive side, it yields little; on the negative side, its importance is greater. It is not permissible to argue against the Virgin Birth tradition on the ground that the Fourth Evangelist rejected it. We may go further and say that, having regard to his evident preoccupation with the Logos-doctrine, it may not even be safe to make too much of the fact that he ignored the tradition.

VII.

Of the New Testament Writings, other than the First and Third Gospels, there remain THE PASTORAL AND THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES AND THE APOCALYPSE. Whether *the Pastoral Epistles* are the work of St. Paul or not, their silence regarding the Virgin Birth cannot be pressed. 1 Tim. iii. 16 (probably a fragment from an early Christian hymn) may or may not be significant in its silence; but, in either direction, the inference would be unsafe. These writings are much too brief and restricted in subject-matter to leave room for the argument from silence. The same view is also true of *the Catholic Epistles*. *The Apocalypse* contains one passage (xii) which has been thought to indicate the writer's knowledge of the doctrine,[1] but the inference is far from being certain, and, in any case, in view of the date of the Book, it would add nothing to our knowledge which cannot be learnt more clearly elsewhere.

VIII.

We may summarize the historical results reached in the present chapter as follows:—

1. *There is no certain instance of a New Testament writer who knew of the Virgin Birth tradition, and yet repudiated it.*

[1] According to Cheyne (*Bible Problems*, pp. 76 ff.), the chapter contains a Jewish Messianic legend of Babylonian origin, which was the source of the Virgin Birth tradition.

It is more than doubtful if an exception can be found even in the case of the Fourth Gospel, though the Evangelist makes no doctrinal use of the tradition. If the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews knew of the doctrine, the same is probably true of that writer also.

2. *The doctrine had no place in the subject-matter of Apostolic preaching.* This view is supported by all the available evidence. The silence of the Pauline Epistles, of the Acts, and of the Second Gospel can be explained in no other way.

3. *The tradition was not a matter of public knowledge during the period covered in common by the Pauline Epistles, the Second Gospel, and Q.*

4. *It is also probable that the same conclusion should be extended to the period covered by the Second Gospel alone, if this Book is dated later than St. Paul's lifetime, as it usually is.*

Until we have examined the Virgin Birth tradition reflected in the First and Third Gospels, it would not be right to discuss these results further, except to say that an historical argument against the Virgin Birth based on these conclusions alone would be precarious. The chief importance of the results reached is the help they furnish in deciding when belief in the Virgin Birth first became current.

CHAPTER II

THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE THIRD GOSPEL

THE question to be discussed in this chapter needs careful definition. What we wish to discover, if possible, is whether the Virgin Birth is an original element in the Third Gospel. This question is not without a certain ambiguity. It is sometimes taken as if it were equivalent to the further question, Did St. Luke teach the Virgin Birth? It is clear that these questions are closely connected; nevertheless, they are distinct, and should be kept distinct. The difference is at once apparent if, for purposes of argument, we assume that the doctrine really does belong to a later stratum in the Gospel. In this case, all the references to the tradition must have been inserted, either (i) by an unknown reader, editor, or scribe, or (ii) by St. Luke himself. In either case, the Virgin Birth would be a later element in the Gospel; but the two senses in which this could be true are clearly very different.

Before one could say that St. Luke did not teach the Virgin Birth, it would be necessary to show that he did not write the passage Lk. i. 34 f.,[1] and this is a point which cannot be determined by arguments derived from the context and subject-matter alone. Such arguments may, or may not, be able to prove that the doctrine is a later element, but they cannot show that it is a non-Lukan element. This is a second and distinct step, which is not justified until the textual and the linguistic facts have been examined. Then, and then only, can we say if St. Luke taught the Virgin Birth.

In the present chapter all questions of a linguistic character will be left aside. Lk. i. 34 f. is perfectly susceptible of the linguistic test, and this will be applied in its proper place. The only arguments we shall consider at present will be those which

[1] The passage which begins with the words: 'And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?'

arise out of matters of context and subject-matter. In the light, then, of the principle laid down above, the question whether St. Luke taught the Virgin Birth, does not yet properly arise. The only question we have to consider at this stage is whether the Virgin Birth is an original element in the Third Gospel, interpreting that question in its strictest and barest sense.

The distinction we have drawn is perfectly obvious when it is pointed out. At the same time, one cannot read the literature which treats of the Third Gospel in relation to the Virgin Birth, without feeling how frequently the point has been neglected. The assumption, that, if the Virgin Birth is found to be a later element in the Gospel, we must straightway have recourse to the hypothesis of non-Lukan interpolation, runs through the writings of critics of all schools like a refrain. Its presence in the arguments of those who deny the Virgin Birth is often sufficiently clear. But the same assumption is also tacitly made by many critics on the other side. It would be ungenerous, and perhaps unwarranted, to suggest that this assumption has prevented many orthodox writers from doing justice to the objections which have been raised against the view that the doctrine was present in the Gospel from the very first. That its effects have been harmful in the interests of dispassionate investigation, is, however, hardly open to question. In the treatment which follows, an attempt will be made to avoid this fallacy, and to keep the discussion within the limits which are proper to itself.

The material to be examined is found for the most part in the first two chapters of the Gospel, and consists (1) of certain narratives and passages, which apparently are inconsistent with the view that the author wrote with a knowledge of the Virgin Birth, and (2) of the passage i. 34 f., which implies the doctrine, but is believed by many scholars to be a later insertion. Outside chaps. i and ii, the only passages which call for notice are iii. 22, iii. 23, and iv. 22.

We may say at once that we have few new arguments to bring forward. The contentions we have to examine are familiar to every one who studies the question of the Virgin Birth. They have been brilliantly stated in two well-known articles in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica,* one by P. W. Schmiedel (on 'Mary'), and the other by Usener ('Nativity'). In a review (HJ., vol. i,

no. 1, p. 164), Dr. Moffatt justly describes these articles as 'competent and first-rate essays, which deserve alert recognition'. But both these articles not only deny that the Virgin Birth was an original element in the Third Gospel, but also that St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, ever taught that doctrine—and this without any linguistic examination of the passage i. 34 f. They provide, in fact, a clear illustration of the point we have already discussed. Inasmuch, then, as our purpose is to consider the question, Was the Virgin Birth an original element in the Third Gospel?, interpreted in its strictest terms, we shall need to state and weigh the arguments afresh. This is the more desirable, because, in the form in which these scholars present their case, each argument is put forward with an assurance and a finality which individually it does not merit. It is the cumulative force of a number of arguments, each of which has strong presumptive value, which ultimately carries conviction; not a series of arguments each of which is conclusive in itself. We do not suppose, of course, that a writer like Schmiedel would deny anything so obvious as this. Nevertheless, very many English readers feel that his several arguments are stated too much in the light of the result. Moreover, they appear to be shaped by presuppositions which are themselves fatal to the Virgin Birth. In the present treatment of the question, an attempt will be made to assign to each argument its proper force, to observe its limitations as well as its cogency. The result sought is not a conclusion to which we can append a triumphant Q. E. D., but that hypothesis, whatever it be, which best explains the observed facts taken as a whole.

I.

Our first task must be to examine *those narratives and passages in the Third Gospel which are said to be irreconcilable with the view that St. Luke wrote in the belief that Jesus was miraculously conceived of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost.* What we have to ask is whether or not they are consistent with that supposition. We begin with Lk. iii. 22.

(a) *Lk. iii. 22, according to the 'Western Text'.*

In the great majority of existing MSS. this passage reads as in the RV., 'Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well

pleased'. But in Codex Bezae, supported by Old Latin MSS. and by quotations in Justin and Clement, the passage reads, '*Thou art my Son: to-day have I begotten Thee*'. Blass (*Philology of the Gospels*, p. 168 f.) believes this to be the genuine Lukan reading, and explains the common text as 'a product of assimilation to the other Gospels'. Usener (EB., col. 3348) also accepts the 'Western' reading, and says, 'Thus the passage in Lk. was read, in the Greek Church down to about 300 A.D. and in the Latin West down to and beyond 360 A.D.' Dr. Moffatt (INT., 3rd ed., p. 269) goes so far as to say that the Lukan reading 'undoubtedly was *υἱός μου εἶ σύ· ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε*'. He follows this reading in his *Translation of the New Testament*, and says (p. 74), 'In the other MSS. it has been altered, for harmonistic reasons'. These opinions, and the arguments upon which they rest, have great weight. If the 'Western' reading is accepted, a strong presumption is set up against the view that the Third Gospel originally contained the Virgin Birth; for it is very difficult to believe that the hand which wrote, 'To-day have I begotten Thee', had already described the miraculous birth. (Cf. also Harnack, *Sayings*, pp. 310 ff.)

At first sight Blass's argument would seem to show a way of escape from this conclusion. He defends the 'Western' reading by showing the close connexion which it has with the following verse. 'The "*to-day* have I begotten Thee" stands in opposition to the "thirty years", and the "Thou art *my* Son" likewise to "being as was supposed the son of *Joseph*"' (op. cit., p. 169). The phrase 'as was supposed' (verse 23) will fall to be discussed next. Meanwhile we may observe that the connexion which Blass notes is actually strengthened if what St. Luke originally wrote was 'being the son of Joseph'. This is the real point in the parallelism, as Blass himself indicates by printing the name Joseph in italics.

If the 'Western' reading is to be accepted, a very interesting question arises as regards St. Luke's conception of the Baptism of Jesus. There is no need to suppose that he looked upon it as the occasion of the imparting of the Divine Sonship. If the connexion which Blass notes be allowed, it is probably purely literary, and the form in which St. Luke reports the logion is

determined by his recollection of Ps. ii. 7.[1] There is no intention, that is to say, on his part, of describing an act of deification or even adoption. But if the connexion is literary, we return again to the question, Can we think that St. Luke would have written the passage in this form, if he had already described the miraculous birth? Can we explain his deliberate preference for the language of Ps. ii. 7? The answer is, we feel bound to say, It is difficult, if it is not impossible. The force of this argument rests, nevertheless, upon the confidence with which we can accept the 'Western' reading; and while the present writer would favour that reading himself, he recognizes that its attestation is not such as to compel acceptance. Moffatt's claim that it 'undoubtedly was' the Lukan reading is too strong. The most we can say is that it has great, if not very great probability in its favour.

(b) *The Lukan Genealogy and Lk. iii. 23.*

It will be best at this point to consider the question of the Lukan Genealogy, and also the passage to which attention has just been called: 'being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph' (RV.).

An examination of the Genealogy reveals the fact that it is artificially constructed, it is an arrangement of names in multiples of seven (cf. Sanday, *Outlines*, p. 202). The whole list contains seventy-seven names. From Adam to Abraham there are twenty-one names (7 × 3); from Isaac to David fourteen names (7 × 2), if we include, as we probably should, the name Admin, as in the RV. margin; from Nathan to Shealtiel twenty-one names; and from Zerubbabel to Christ twenty-one names. Not only is this so, but in order to preserve the symbolic arrangement, names are repeated and omitted. Thus in verse 36, the compiler has preferred the LXX to the Hebrew. This permits the name Cainan to be introduced into the Genealogy twice, as the son of Arphaxad in verse 36, and again as the son of Enos in verse 37. No Hebrew MS. mentions Cainan as the son of Arphaxad. Again, in the list from Isaac to David, the name Ram (cf. 1 Chron. ii. 10 and Ruth iv. 19) is omitted, and in its

[1] Or was taken from Q. See Harnack's *Sayings*, p. 314; *Oxford Studies in Synoptic Problem*, p. 187.

place the two names Admin and Arni appear. Whatever be the explanation of these facts, it is significant that in this way the symmetrical arrangement is preserved.

It is not probable that a Genealogy of such an artificial character was constructed by St. Luke himself. He shows no predilection for symbolic numbers in his writings, and does not indeed appear to observe this feature in the list. (Cf. Sanday, op. cit., p. 202, and contrast Mt. i. 17.) Probably he found the Genealogy ready to hand. The fact that it traces the descent to Adam may have appealed to him, in view of his own bent of mind, and it may have been this feature in the list which led him to incorporate it in his Gospel. The words 'the son of God' with which the list ends, may be due to St. Luke himself, 'added for the sake of Gentile readers, to remind them of the Divine origin of the human race' (Plummer, ICC., St. Luke, p. 105).

It does not seem likely that the Genealogy in its original form, in the form, that is to say, in which St. Luke found it, contained the words which now stand in iii. 23, '*as was supposed*'. It is generally allowed at the present day that the Genealogies, both in the First Gospel and in the Third, trace the ancestry of Jesus through Joseph. But unlike the Matthaean Genealogy, that in Lk. gives us no reason to suppose that *legal* descent only is traced in it. It is therefore difficult to believe that its author intended to construct a chain of descent in which the vital link should contain the words, 'as was supposed'. These words more naturally give the impression of being a later insertion intended to adapt the Genealogy to a new situation. For our present purpose the important question is, Are these words the words of St. Luke?, and what is still more vital, At what point, if Lukan, were they inserted in the Genealogy,—when it was first incorporated in the Gospel, or at some subsequent time? If from the first they stood where they now stand, it is obvious that the Third Gospel taught the Virgin Birth from the beginning. If, on the other hand, they were added after the Gospel was written (or its earlier chapters), this supports the view that the doctrine is a later element.

The data at present at our disposal do not enable us to decide between these alternatives. We may argue *a priori* that it is

unlikely that St. Luke would have thought it worth while to introduce the Genealogy at all, if at the time when he wove it into his Gospel he had realized the necessity of interpolating the words 'as was supposed'. In other words, we may say that had he known of the Virgin Birth from the first he would never have made use of the Genealogy. And further, we may argue that we best conserve St. Luke's reputation as a skilful writer by supposing the phrase 'as was supposed' to be a correction, introduced to make the best of a Genealogy, used in the first place under presuppositions which new information had now led him to discard. Short of excising the Genealogy altogether—we may say—he did the best he could. But such speculations, however attractive, do not lead to a conclusion which we can regard with confidence. It is better to leave iii. 23 to depend upon the conclusion to which we come with regard to i. 34 f. This is the crucial passage, and if this should prove to be a later insertion, then iii. 23 must also be regarded as such, introduced by the same hand at the same time and for the same reasons.

(c) *The Narratives of Lk. ii.*

We have now to examine the narratives of Lk. ii, and to ask, *Under what presuppositions were they shaped?* The incidents which call for special notice are the Purifying, the meeting with Simeon in the Temple, and the visit of Jesus to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. The five passages which speak of 'the parents' of Jesus will be considered separately. There is no need to dwell on the story of the visit of the shepherds. It goes without saying that it nowhere presupposes the Virgin Birth. On the other hand, there is nothing in the presentation of the story which is alien to the doctrine.

Turning to the story of the Purifying in Lk. ii. 22–4, we are met by the question, What are we to understand by the phrase '*their purification*' (ii. 22)? Attempts have been made to take the pronoun as referring to the mother and the child, but, in view of the construction of the passage, this exegesis is impossible. Joseph and Mary are clearly the unexpressed subject of the verb in the sentence in which the pronoun 'their' occurs ('And when the days of *their* purification . . . were fulfilled, *they* brought him up to Jerusalem'). Schmiedel holds that the word 'their' refers

to Joseph and Mary,[1] and without doubt this opinion is correct. But if this is so, is it probable that St. Luke had the thought of a virgin birth in the background of his mind when he first penned the phrase? Is not the pronoun one which we may think he would have been anxious to avoid? Nor was there any need for him to introduce it, since, according to the Levitical law, it was only the mother who was made unclean by a birth (cf. Lev. xii). Schmiedel, who calls attention to this fact, thinks that the writer has made 'an archaeological error'. 'This error serves to show that the writer regarded Joseph as the actual father of Jesus; otherwise he could not have thought of him at all as unclean' (EB., col. 2955). Even if we think that Schmiedel's remorseless logic is too confidently applied, the fact remains that St. Luke's pronoun is as unnecessary as it is ambiguous. The difficulty of the expression is not felt by the modern mind alone. It is reflected in two subsequent textual alterations. Instead of 'their purification', the Codex Bezae reads 'his purification', and the Sin. Syr. MS., together with the cursive 76, has the pronoun 'her'. The textual evidence forbids us to accept the reading 'her purification', but this is assuredly the phrase we should expect a writer to use who has just told the story of a virgin birth.

In the two remaining stories, that of the meeting with Simeon, and that of the visit of Jesus to Jerusalem, there is a common element which provokes reflection in *the surprise of Joseph and Mary*. In reference to the prophecy of Simeon concerning Jesus, we are told that they '*were marvelling at*' the things that were said (ii. 33). We can readily account for this remark, if St. Luke had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth at the time of writing, for the prophecy of Simeon transcends that of the angelic announcement of i. 31–3. Whereas the latter does not leave the soil of Israel, the former speaks of a revelation to the Gentiles. We could say, then, that the wider scope of the prophecy of Simeon provides room for wonder. But can we say this if St. Luke believed Mary to have received the announcement of a virgin birth, which, moreover, had been fulfilled? Would he have thought any prophecy called for wonder after such facts as

[1] EB., col. 2955 n. Cf. Plummer, ICC., St. Lk., p. 63.

these? The same difficulty arises in the story of the visit to the Temple. After St. Luke has recorded the pregnant words of Jesus, 'Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?', he writes: '*And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them*' (ii. 50). If, in this case, as distinguished from ii. 33, the Evangelist had said that they marvelled, the difficulty would be less great. It might then have been argued that, inasmuch as the facts of His birth had not been made known to the boy Jesus, there was room for wonder that already He should have attained to such a consciousness of filial relationship to God. But to say that they did not understand His words is an astonishing statement on the part of a writer who believes the Virgin Birth. On the other hand, it is a perfectly natural remark, if we can presume the Evangelist to have written in the absence of such a belief.[1]

Speaking of the narratives of Lk. ii, as a whole, we may say that, apart from the references to 'the parents', which remain to be considered, distinct difficulties are raised if we must believe that St. Luke knew of the Virgin Birth at the time when he first wrote the chapter, and that greater justice can be done to the narratives if we can presume him to have written them without that knowledge. How far this view is supported by the five passages which speak of Joseph and Mary, we have now to consider.

(d) *The References to Joseph and Mary in Lk. ii.*

These passages are as follows: ii. 27, '*the parents*'; ii. 41 and 43, '*his parents*'; ii. 33, '*his father and his mother*'; and ii. 48, '*thy father and I*'. The point to be considered is whether we can suppose St. Luke to have known of the Virgin Birth at the time when he used these expressions.

The last passage (ii. 48) differs from the rest, and should not be pressed. It is reasonable to urge that, in addressing the boy Jesus, Mary would naturally speak in this way, even if the Virgin Birth is historically true; and that it is conceivable that

[1] In this connexion it should be observed that the same note of wonder appears in ii. 18 in the case of all those who hear the shepherds' words. But according to the terms of ii. 17, what *they* are told is the angelic message of ii. 10–12, in which the Virgin Birth is not mentioned. The presumption is that ii. 33 stands upon the same plane.

St. Luke, while himself holding the doctrine, should have been so far faithful to his sources as to preserve Mary's words in this form.

In this respect the four passages which remain are quite different, *in that they are expressions which St. Luke himself employs*. This gives them a distinctive character which has often been overlooked. It has been too frequently assumed that these passages are of like character to those which belong to the story of Jesus at the synagogue at Nazareth. In this incident the Jews speak of Jesus as 'the carpenter's son' (Mt. xiii. 55. Cf. Mk. vi. 3, 'the carpenter, the son of Mary'). St. Luke, who records the same incident, but perhaps follows a special source of his own (Lk. iv. 16 ff.), gives the question in the form, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' With regard to these passages, it is open to any one to urge that in them we have instances of the accuracy with which the Gospels record contemporary beliefs, which were natural but erroneous. The language of the Jews, it may be said, is justified by ignorance of the true facts, and its retention by Evangelists who teach the Virgin Birth is evidence of their fidelity to detail. This is a reasonable argument, and it cannot be gainsaid, until the whole question has been faced (again, as in the case of ii. 48). But the four passages in Lk. ii stand upon an entirely different footing. In these passages it is not a question of what is justified by ignorance, but of what is possible in the light of knowledge. Assuming that we have to do with a writer who believes Jesus to be the son of Mary by the direct operation of the Holy Ghost, we have to ask whether, believing this, and having (on this assumption) just stated this very thing, that writer would be at all likely to speak of 'the parents', 'his parents', and, indeed, to use an expression so definite as 'his father and his mother'. In short, granting that St. Luke has recorded the language of the Nazarenes, can we suppose that he would have used the same language himself in the light of the Virgin Birth? It is not as if these modes of speech were indispensable. The words 'Joseph and Mary' could easily have been employed, and in this way all danger of ambiguity removed. In the face of a fact so unique as a virgin birth, one would expect an effort to avoid ambiguity; all the more, in the case of a writer, with

whose apt choice of words and delicacy of expression scholars like Ramsay and Harnack have made us familiar.

In saying this we are not guilty of imposing modern canons of accuracy upon an ancient writer. The difficulties we ourselves feel have long been felt. 'It is very noteworthy that six old Latin codices in ii. 41 have *Ioseph et Maria* for "his parents" (*οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ*); most uncials in ii. 33 substitute "Joseph" ([*ὁ*] *ιωσηφ*) for "his father" (*ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ*)' (Schmiedel, EB., col. 2955). None of these readings can claim, of course, to be original, since admittedly they represent attempts to remove difficulties. Their significance lies in the fact that they indicate that those difficulties have long been felt. They show that we are not asking an ancient writer to conform to modern standards, when we assert that St. Luke has expressed himself with an ambiguity which it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand, if he wrote from the first in the knowledge of the Virgin Birth.

The impression made by the narratives of Lk. ii is thus deepened and confirmed by the several references to Joseph and Mary.

(e) *Lk. ii. 5.*

The bearing of the facts examined thus far is in the direction of showing the Virgin Birth to belong to a later stratum in the Gospel. One passage in Lk. ii might seem to invalidate this view. In the Revised Version, verse 5 reads: '*to enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child*'. These words, if they must stand, imply that the Virgin Birth is known to the writer. But, apart altogether from the historical character of the miracle, it is highly probable that we ought to read: '*with Mary his wife*'.[1] This is the reading of the Sinaitic Syriac and of the Old Latin MSS. a, b, c; and the word 'wife' together with 'betrothed', also appears in AC²ΓΔΛ, l, q*, Syrᵖ, vulg., goth., aeth. (Moffatt, INT., p. 269). There

[1] So among others Schmiedel, Usener, Häcker, and Blass, who writes (op. cit., p. 171 n.): '"The espoused wife" of the ordinary text is a very clear corruption, due to an assimilation to i. 27 (where the case is quite different) and to dogmatic prejudices . . .' 'That we have here a case of real contamination is seen very plainly in the old Freising MS., in which the ancient variants *τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ* and *τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ* still stand together in immediate juxtaposition' (Usener, EB., col. 3350).

is much to be said for the view that this is one of the cases in which 'Western' readings, where Old Syriac and Old Latin MSS. agree, probably preserve an original text.[1] When we add the argument of transcriptional probability, it is difficult to resist this conclusion. One can easily understand how the reading 'with Mary his wife' could come to be altered to 'with Mary, who was betrothed to him' by those who imagined that the former was inconsistent with the Virgin Birth. But, if the words 'with Mary, who was betrothed to him' stood in the primitive text, can we give any satisfactory explanation of the change? When we consider that from New Testament times the Virgin Birth was part of the faith of the Church, questioned by few save the Ebionites and some of the Gnostic sects, the supposition that 'with Mary his wife' is a later corruption, becomes improbable in the extreme. It is hardly sufficient to adopt Plummer's suggestion, that 'the *γυναικί* of A. Vulg. Syr. and Aeth. is a gloss, but a correct one' (op. cit., p. 53). Must we not find more than a gloss? Moreover, is this a satisfactory explanation of the Sin. Syr. and of those Old Latin MSS. which have 'wife' without 'betrothed'? We should probably conclude that in this instance the 'Western' reading, supported by transcriptional probability, must outweigh the evidence of even the great uncials, and that what St. Luke wrote was 'with Mary his wife'.

If this view is sound, the verse in itself is not necessarily inconsistent with the Virgin Birth, since it may reasonably be urged that it carries us no further than Mt. i. 24, where the marriage is implied.[2] If this fact is put forward in a narrative

[1] On the agreement of the Old Syriac and Old Latin against the great uncials, cf. Kirsopp Lake (*The Text of the NT.*, p. 90 f.), 'Perhaps the general result is to make it probable that W. H. (largely from lack of evidence) underestimated the possibility that a consensus of the Old Latin and Old Syriac may give us a really primitive text even when opposed to the great uncials'. To similar effect Burkitt writes, 'It is, however, in the direction here indicated—viz., the preservation of the true text in a considerable number of cases by "Western" documents alone—that criticism may ultimately be able to advance beyond the point reached by Hort' (EB., col. 4990 f.). 'I am unable to assume that the edition of Westcott and Hort gives us a final text in either Gospel [Mt. and Mk.]. In particular, I am inclined to believe that the second century readings, attested by the ecclesiastical writers of that century, and by the Syriac and Latin versions, are often deserving of preference' (W. C. Allen, ICC., St. Mt., p. lxxxvii).

[2] 'And Joseph . . . took unto him his wife.'

which expressly teaches the Virgin Birth, it could be so here. The phrase 'with Mary his wife' is certainly congruous with the view that the doctrine is a later element in the Third Gospel, but it would be improper to employ it in support of that view. (The case is like those of ii. 48, iv. 22.) But even if we must leave the question open, at any rate we have no longer to reckon with the words, 'with Mary, who was betrothed to him'. There is nothing, therefore, in the verse which is in conflict with the view that St. Luke had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth when he first wrote his Gospel.

Before leaving this part of the subject it may be well to recall the nature of the argument. The several points treated are not regarded as contentions which inexorably demand a certain conclusion, but as distinct difficulties, greater or less, which arise, on the view that St. Luke knew of the Virgin Birth from the first. We may fairly say that the facts examined thus far would be best satisfied by considering the Virgin Birth as a later element in the Gospel; but, until we have investigated the important passage Lk. i. 34 f., it would be precarious to say more.

II.

In the Revised Version Lk. i. 34 f. reads as follows: '*And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* (35) *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God.*' As regards the last clause, the margin gives the alternative rendering: 'the holy thing which is to be born shall be called the Son of God'. The difference rests upon a question of punctuation in the Greek, and does not affect our immediate problem.

Our purpose in this section is to inquire how far the view, which is widely held, that Lk. i. 34 f. is a later insertion is justified. But two important questions must detain us first. (*a*) Is the assumption we have made thus far, that Lk. i. 34 f. implies the Virgin Birth, tenable? What is the true interpretation of the passage? (*b*) What is the purport of the angelic announcement in Lk. i. 30–3? Is Dr. Plummer's language justified, when,

in reference to this message, he speaks of 'the strange declaration that she [Mary] is to have a son before she is married' (op. cit., p. 24)? Is there any suggestion of a virgin birth?

(a) *The Interpretation of Lk. i. 34 f.*

In the text as it stands, in answer to the angel's words in Lk. i. 30–3, Mary says: '*How shall this be, seeing I know not* (*οὐ γινώσκω*) *a man?*' The interpretation of this verse depends upon the force we give to the word *γινώσκω*. Schmiedel (EB., col. 2956) thinks that *γινώσκω* in this verse 'cannot mean the act of concubitus for which the word is often employed', because it is here used in the present tense. On the other hand, the quite general sense of knowledge in the way of acquaintanceship, is also, in his view, 'equally precluded', since it would be 'quite meaningless in the present context'. Accordingly, he finds the true interpretation to be 'the intermediate one; I have no such acquaintanceship with any man as might lead to the fulfilment of this prophecy'. In other words, Mary's objection or difficulty is that she is not even betrothed. Schmiedel is not daunted by the fact that this interpretation is in conflict with Lk. i. 27 ('a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph'). Indeed, the contradiction is given as one reason for regarding Lk. i. 34 f. as a later insertion. In this respect Schmiedel's view will probably not command much support. He gives no example of *γινώσκω* used in the special sense in which he interprets it, and fails to justify his rejection of the common use of the verb. (See Th-Gr., p. 117; VGT., p. 127.) It is altogether preferable to follow Dr. Plummer (op. cit., p. 24), whose view is indicated in the references which he gives to the OT. passages, Gen. xix. 8; Judg. xi. 39; Num. xxxi. 17. 'The words', says Dr. Plummer, 'are the avowal of a maiden conscious of her own purity'. According to this view the phrase 'seeing I know not a man' must be interpreted of the marital relationship. Mary's perplexity is that she, an unmarried woman, is promised an immediate conception. It is impossible to accept Schmiedel's view, when he says: 'Mary takes the words of the angel as referring to a fulfilment in the way of nature'. This explanation is, of course, consistent on the interpretation which Schmiedel gives to Mary's question, but not on that which we have found

reason to prefer. Had Mary understood the angelic message to mean a natural human birth after marriage, there would have been no cause for perplexity. Her words, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?', are clearly *a reply to what is understood as the announcement of an immediate conception*, and not of a birth within the marriage tie.

If this view is taken of Mary's words, it follows that verse 35 must be explained as the yet clearer announcement of a virgin birth, supernaturally caused. If the verse is treated in itself, it is possible to interpret it of an ordinary human birth, and there is much that is attractive in the interpretation. The words may be said to speak of the Holy Ghost who should come upon Mary to inspire and preserve the purity of her soul in the act of conception. They may speak, that is to say, of God's use of His own appointed agencies. But, to accept this view, it would be necessary to regard the words 'seeing I know not a man' as a later insertion, and, though this opinion has been held by some (including Kattenbusch, Weinel, J. M. Thompson), it does not on the whole commend itself as a satisfactory solution of the problem (see further pp. 69 ff.). We are compelled therefore to accept the ordinary interpretation of verse 35, as implying the Miraculous Conception.

(b) *The Purport of the Angelic Announcement in Lk. i. 30–3.*

In treating Mary's question in Lk. i. 34, we have concluded that it reflects the point of view of one who has received the announcement of a miraculous birth. But this conclusion does not compel us to interpret the words of Lk. i. 30–3 as containing such an announcement. We have to examine the passage so as to determine whether as a matter of fact it is susceptible of that interpretation. That its present context requires this view of Lk. i. 30–3 is a fact not lightly to be regarded; nevertheless, it must find justification *within the passage itself* before it can be accepted.

In the Revised Version, the angelic message reads as follows: '*Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.* (31) *And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.* (32) *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give*

unto him the throne of his father David: (33) *and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*'

We have already expressed the view that this prophecy moves strictly within Jewish limits (p. 29). Detailed study of the passage only serves to confirm this opinion. The Sonship mentioned in verse 32 bears a purely Messianic character. Dr. Plummer justly remarks: 'The title *υἱὸς Ὑψίστου* expresses some very close relation between Jesus and Jehovah, but not the Divine Sonship in the Trinity' (op. cit., p. 23). *Nothing is either said or implied in this announcement of a miraculous birth.* The terms of the promise to Mary would be perfectly fulfilled by an ordinary birth within the marriage tie, so far, that is to say, as the mode of birth is concerned. We must therefore reject the view which speaks of 'the strange declaration that she is to bear a son before she is married' (Plummer). We look in vain for this declaration. We agree that Mary's question in verse 34 demands such a declaration in order to make it rational. In fact, we ourselves have argued that verse 34 is 'a reply to what is understood as the announcement of an immediate conception'. Nevertheless, even on the most generous interpretation of Lk. i. 30–3, it is impossible to find in the passage any such announcement.[1] There is thus a radical difference of point of view between the angelic announcement of Lk. i. 30–3 and Mary's question in Lk. i. 34. This difference of standpoint will be urged as one, though not the only reason for regarding Lk. i. 34 f. as a later insertion. But before we examine these reasons, we need to consider whether after all the angelic announcement may not contain some implication (which does not lie upon the surface of the passage) that a Miraculous Conception is promised.

We find it impossible to rest satisfied in the suggestion of W. C. Allen, that there may have been some unrecorded indication of something unique in the conception (*Interpreter*, 1905, p. 121 f.). A suggestion of this kind can neither be justified

[1] While we are unable to acquiesce in Schmiedel's view that 'Mary takes the words of the angel as referring to a fulfilment in the way of nature', we may fairly say that, if the passage Lk. i. 30–8 is a unity, Mary ought to have been represented as taking the angel's words in this way, and that this would be the plain natural sense in which to take them.

nor gainsaid, and is valuable only as a confirmation of the view that there is nothing 'recorded' in Lk. i. 30–3 of a unique conception. To launch upon the waters of what is unrecorded would seem to be a policy of despair. There is much more to be said for an extremely interesting suggestion of Canon Box in his article on the Virgin Birth in Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (see vol. ii, p. 806 a). Box argues that in the angelic announcement of Lk. i. 30–3 'an immediate conception is meant'. Accepting the view that a Hebrew original underlies the nativity-narratives of Lk. i, ii, he thinks that this original has been incorrectly translated in Lk. i. 31, where, in the Greek, we have the future tense *συλλήψῃ*, 'thou shalt conceive'. 'The Hebrew original of *συλλήψῃ* would be a participle', he says, 'and the exact rendering would be, "Behold, thou art conceiving now"'. There can be no doubt that, if this view can be allowed, the angelic announcement really does speak of a miraculous birth, and thus an adequate explanation is given of Mary's surprise in Lk. i. 34. There are, however, certain objections which, in the judgement of the present writer, appear to be fatal to this theory. We need not press the objection that it rests upon an initial assumption, the existence of the supposed Hebrew original, since this theory of a Hebrew (or Aramaic) documentary source is accepted by most British scholars. Nor is it more than a formal objection if we question if the word *συλλήψῃ* would necessarily be represented in the supposed Hebrew original by a participle. In the Hebrew NT. published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, the adjective הָרָה is used, and this is the case in similar passages in the Hebrew OT., viz. Gen. xvi. 11, xxxviii. 24; Judg. xiii. 7 (verse 3, perf.); 1 Sam. iv. 19; 2 Sam. xi. 5; Isa. vii. 14. A more serious objection arises from Lk. ii. 21, where it is said that the name Jesus was so called by the angel 'before he was conceived in the womb' (*πρὸ τοῦ συλληφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ*). On the theory we are considering, this must be held to be either a second mistranslation of the Hebrew original, or a departure from it. In either case we must conclude that a promised conception, and not an immediate one, was the considered view of the translator of the Hebrew document. A second and conclusive objection to the theory of Canon Box rests upon

questions of grammatical syntax. Is it correct to say that 'the exact rendering' of the participle (or adj.) would be, 'Behold, thou art conceiving now'? It is true that the active participle is 'mainly descriptive of something present' (Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 134), but it is also true, to quote the same authority, that 'the participle does not indicate time, its colour in this respect being taken from the connexion in which it stands'. The same consideration also applies to הָרָה in all the OT. instances referred to above. Where it is made clear in the context that conception has already taken place, הָרָה is translated in the RV. by the present (cf. Gen. xvi. 11, xxxviii. 24; 2 Sam. xi. 5). Where, however, there is no such indication, it is rendered by the future, and the announcement is treated as a promise (cf. Judg. xiii. 7).

To convict the translator of the Hebrew document of an error in translation, it is clearly necessary to show from the context of Lk. i. 31 that conception has already taken place. In other words, the translation preferred by Canon Box, if it is to be accepted, must be justified by some statement, either previously made, or made within the angelic announcement itself; it must be required, that is to say, by something in the narrative previous to Mary's question in Lk. i. 34.[1] But these conditions, which are by no means arbitrary, cannot be met. We must, therefore, conclude that the translator was quite justified, when he used the future (συλλήψῃ), and so represented the announcement as a prophecy; and we must draw this conclusion, irrespective altogether of the difference of point of view which thus stands revealed between this announcement and verse 34 in the connexion in which it now appears. Indeed, the argument of Canon Box seems capable of being employed in a direction the very reverse of that intended. It could be argued that since, in point of fact, the translator has used the future in verse 31, there was nothing in the Hebrew original to suggest to his mind the idea of an

[1] The claim, therefore, that the suggested translation is supported by the words 'with haste' in verse 39 (Box) cannot be sustained. Moreover, these words are easily satisfied on the usual view of a promised conception. See further an article by the present writer in the *Expository Times* (May, 1919), *Is the Lukan Narrative of the Birth of Christ a Prophecy?* In l. 16 in the second column read: 'It could *not* be anything else'.

immediate conception; not even the statement of verse 34, which might have suggested, though it does not justify, the rendering, 'Behold, thou art conceiving now'. Thus we might enlist the considered view of the translator, that a promised conception is meant, in support of the contention that Lk. i. 34 f. is a later insertion. Without pressing this view, we may fairly say that there is much more to be said for it than for the theory we have discussed. The latter theory, in spite of all that can be urged in its favour, fails to justify itself. In that case its failure seems to illustrate the somewhat desperate expedients to which we must have recourse, in order to find in the angelic announcement the thought of an immediate conception. On the question as a whole, we can only conclude that such a view is neither stated nor implied in the announcement, but that, on the contrary, its reference is to the future.

(c) *Reasons for regarding Lk. i. 34 f. as a Later Insertion.*

Having sought to give their full force and proper meaning to the two passages, Lk. i. 30–3 and Lk. i. 34 f., we may now consider the arguments which can be advanced in favour of regarding the latter passage as an interpolation. In respect of these arguments, there is far from general agreement among those who are at one in the conclusion reached. But the significant fact is not the diversity of opinion as regards the mode of proof, but the agreement of so many scholars in holding the passage to be a later insertion.[1] The arguments we shall examine are not equally cogent, and, as in the first part of the present chapter, we shall call attention to their limitations as well as to the points in which they are strong. We shall also treat the case entirely apart from the results suggested in the first half of our inquiry. Those results, if valid, set up a presupposition against Lk. i. 34 f. But it seems much the best not to avail ourselves of such an argument, but rather to consider the passage in itself and in relation to its context. If in this way we find reasonable grounds for considering Lk. i. 34 f. to be

[1] E. g. Cheyne, Conybeare, Grill, Harnack, Hillmann, Holtzmann, Loisy, Montefiore, Pfleiderer, N. Schmidt, Schmiedel, Usener, Völter, J. Weiss. On the other side are Hilgenfeld, Clemen, Gunkel, Chase, Stanton, Orr, Box, Knowling.

a later insertion, we have then a double series of arguments converging on one conclusion.

(1) The first point to be considered is that *verse 36 follows naturally after verse 33*. As we have seen, in verses 30–3 we have an angelic announcement to Mary to the effect that she is to give birth to a son who is destined to become the Messiah. He will be called 'the Son of the Most High', and to him the Lord God will give 'the throne of his father David'. To this message, it may be said, verses 36 and 37 form a fitting sequel. They add the assurance that 'no word from God shall be void of power', in proof of which it is declared that Mary's kinswoman, Elisabeth, is shortly to bear a son in her old age. The whole speech (Lk. i. 30–3, 36, 37) is a consistent passage, and in relation to it the words of Mary in verse 38—'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'—are a natural and fitting reply. Canon Box, in the article already cited, questions this view. 'There would be nothing extraordinary', he says 'in Mary's conceiving a son as Joseph's wife'—nothing, that is to say, to require the sign offered. But surely it is not a question of 'conceiving a son', but of conceiving such a son, the long-promised Messiah; and, moreover, the ratification of so great a promise by means of a miracle is a commonplace of OT. thought. It is not suggested, of course, that this argument proves Lk. i. 34 f. to be an interpolation. That a section runs smoothly when a particular passage within it is excised, is no proof that that passage is not original. This last conclusion must be established on the ground of other arguments. If, however, in the present instance, other arguments carry weight, then the fact that verse 36 can be connected easily and naturally with verse 33 becomes of very great importance, and it is for that reason that we introduce it here.

(2) We take a really decisive step when we instance what already has been found, namely that *verse 34 follows quite unnaturally upon Lk. i. 30–3*. We have seen that Mary's question implies the announcement of an immediate conception, and we have failed to find any such announcement in the angel's words. There is thus a complete difference of point of view in the two passages. No possible ground is provided in the

angelic announcement for the objection raised in verse 34. It is difficult, therefore, to deny the suggestion that Mary's question already implies a knowledge of what is told for the first time in verse 35. But this view, if we accept it, is to say that Mary's question could not possibly have been present to the mind of Mary in the connexion in which it stands; it was the last question she would have thought of asking. The question can only have been put into her mouth by one who already knew of the Virgin Birth, and wished to introduce that doctrine into a context in which originally it did not appear. On the interpretation which we have given to Lk. i. 30–3 and Lk. i. 34 f., this conclusion is inevitable, unless we prefer to find in St. Luke an utter inconsecutiveness of thought which does him no credit as writer, and which neither of his works justify us in attributing to him.

(3) We are unable to attach the same force to the contention that verse 35 is followed unnaturally by verses 36 and 37 (so Schmiedel), though this view has something to be said for it. Verse 35 announces the virgin birth of the promised Messiah, a doctrine which is not found in Jewish literature and tradition, and for which, therefore, the mind of Mary must have been utterly unprepared.[1] As the section now stands, the statement of verses 36 and 37 is added as a sign that what has just been promised will surely come to pass. This sign, we have already argued, would be quite natural, according to OT. modes of thought, as authenticating such a message as that given in Lk. i. 30–3. But can we say this in reference to the promise of a virgin birth? To the modern mind at least the argument seems faulty and unconvincing. Mary is bidden to accept as the divine promise what is so remarkable as to be otherwise unknown to her, on the ground of what is certainly remarkable but familiar to her mind and outlook. In truth, this seems a remarkable argument with which to credit an angel! At the same time, it has to be admitted that such an objection may be too stringent, and that it may not allow sufficiently for ancient modes of thought, according to which the argument from the less to the greater is by no means uncommon. For

[1] But see W. C. Allen, ICC., St. Mt., p. 10 and p. 19.

this reason the present writer would not feel confident in pressing the argument sketched above.[1]

(4) A much stronger argument calls attention to *the similarity between Mary's question and that of Zacharias* (*Lk. i. 18*), *and the difference with which they are treated by the angel.* 'Mary's speech expresses doubt of the truth of the angel's message, and yet she is not so much as blamed, whilst Zacharias is actually punished for a like doubt (i. 20)'.[2] The presumption is that the two cases do not emanate from the same cycle of tradition. The force of this argument depends, of course, upon the way in which we interpret Lk. i. 34. It is true that we have no indication of the tone in which the question is asked, beyond the words themselves and the sentences which follow; but quite sufficient is given to indicate the presence of doubt. The point is not merely one of subjective valuation. This will appear if we consider Plummer's view, which is quite different from Schmiedel's. 'She does not ask for *proof*, as Zacharias did (ver. 18); and only in the form of the words does she ask as to the mode of accomplishment. Her utterance is little more than an involuntary expression of amazement. . . . It is clear that she does not doubt the fact promised, nor for a moment suppose that her child is to be the child of Joseph' (op. cit., p. 24). In weighing this opinion, it should be noticed that it refers only to the words, *Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο*; We may readily agree that if all that Mary had said were, 'How shall this be?', we should be unable to contest this view. But to divide Mary's question in this way is not permissible. The second part, 'seeing I know not a man', clearly determines the first, and debars us from viewing it as merely 'an involuntary expression of amazement'. The presence of doubt, we think, must be conceded, though it is less marked than in the case of Zacharias.

[1] Some scholars, including Häcker, Spitta, and Montefiore, bring verses 36, 37 within the interpolation. Schmiedel's presentation of the argument stated above is as follows: 'Moreover, the case of Elizabeth to which the angel points in v. 36 is no evidence of the possibility of a supernatural conception; it has evidential value only if what has happened to Elizabeth is more wonderful than what is being promised to Mary—namely that she, in the way of nature, is to become the mother of the Messiah' (EB., col. 2957).

[2] Schmiedel, op. cit., col. 2957. To the same effect J. Estlin Carpenter (op. cit., p. 487 f.). Compare Lk. i. 45 where Mary is praised for her faith, and see Moffatt, INT., p. 268 f.

This view, moreover, is supported by the fact that, in the narrative as it stands, an explanation follows, which is also confirmed by a sign. Since, as Plummer says, Mary, unlike Zacharias, does not ask for proof, we need not object that she is not 'punished.' And it is just possible that we make the parallelism too rigid if we lay stress on the fact that 'she is not so much as blamed'. It is rather the 'eulogium' of Lk. i. 45 ('Blessed is she that believed') which presents the difficulty. It is true that, in the narrative as we have it now, Mary believes ultimately (verse 38), but Lk. i. 45 seems rather to belong to a narrative in which Mary believes from the first. We conclude that the present argument gives real support to the view that Lk. i. 34 f. belongs to a source distinct from its context.

(5) A fifth argument dwells on *the different senses* in which Divine Sonship is predicated of the promised child in verse 32 as compared with verse 35. As we have seen, the term *υἱὸς Ὑψίστου* in verse 32 is purely Messianic. But in verse 35 the expression *υἱὸς θεοῦ* must be given a very different meaning. It is in consequence of (*διὸ καί*) the divine overshadowing that the child is to be called 'Son of God'. Here, to quote Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter, the term denotes 'not official adoption, but actual origin', and, with the same writer, we must conclude that verse 35 'is thus a doublet of verses 31, 32 on another plane' (op. cit., p. 487).[1] It is more difficult to decide whether the difference supports the theory of interpolation. We cannot shut out the possibility that two diverse types of Sonship might have been attributed by St. Luke to the same speaker at the same time of writing. But, having said this, we may observe that it is certainly much easier to suppose, and is much more probable, that they belong to different periods of reflection, and are the product (or deposit) of different traditions. This argument, then, may be said to lean in the direction of the theory of interpolation, but, for the reason given above, we should hesitate to urge it, if it stood alone.

(6) We have lastly to look at the vexed question of the Davidic descent. It is safe to say that, if we had not Lk. i. 34 f. in the Gospel as it stands to-day, we should have no ground for

[1] Cf. Lobstein, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, p. 67.

regarding Mary as of Davidic descent. It is the presence of these verses that makes possible that inference in verse 32, where, in addressing Mary, the angel speaks of David as the forefather of the promised child. It is surely a remarkable fact that a point so vital to St. Luke's narrative as the Davidic descent of Mary should be introduced in so incidental a manner. Our wonder is increased when we observe that St. Luke is at great pains to assure Theophilus of the Davidic descent of Joseph. In ii. 4 it is said that Joseph was '*of the house and family of David*'; not a word is said of Mary's descent. It is true that the Sin. Syr. reads, 'because they were both of the house of David'; but this does not naturally fit into the structure of the sentence, is unsupported elsewhere, and is accepted by no one; it clearly represents an attempt to remove a difficulty. In. i. 27 it is also said that Joseph was '*of the house of David*'. The phrase cannot be construed with the word 'virgin', which occurs earlier in the sentence, in view of the fact that after ἐξ οἴκου Δαυείδ St. Luke resumes the thread of the story by saying 'and the virgin's name was Mary'; otherwise, he would have continued (so Schmiedel, op. cit., col. 2957), 'and her name was Mary'. It is not easy indeed to resist Schmiedel's further contention that the phrasing of the sentence expressly forbids our ascribing the Davidic descent to Mary, though the opinion is put forward with greater confidence than seems justified. The one passage in which St. Luke directly refers to the family of Mary is dubious. In i. 36 Elisabeth is said to be '*the kinswoman*' of Mary, and we know from i. 5 that Elisabeth was '*of the daughters of Aaron*', which seems to imply that Mary too was of Levitical descent. But as the precise nature of the relationship is not stated, we cannot say, with Schmiedel, Usener, and others, that this is so. Nevertheless, the broad fact remains that apart from an inference, which itself depends on Lk. i. 34 f., we have no grounds for believing Mary to be a descendant of David. St. Luke undoubtedly believes Jesus to be of Davidic descent; he carefully shows Joseph to be of that descent; he gives us no reason to suppose, that, like the author of the First Gospel, he traced the descent of Jesus through Joseph as His *legal* father; and yet, in spite of all this, he has left the vital question of the Davidic descent of Mary at the mercy of an inference! If he knows Mary to be

a descendant of David, why does he not say so explicitly? We have a right to ask the question, which is neither captious nor unfair. No one has yet answered it satisfactorily, except in the answer that St. Luke had no tradition of the Davidic descent of Mary at his disposal, that he traced the descent of Jesus through Joseph as His real father, that this is the true interpretation of verse 32, and that Lk. i. 34 f. is a later insertion, which has imposed on verse 32 a sense which originally it did not bear. *Regard Lk. i. 34 f. as a later insertion, and all the facts alleged by St. Luke about the Davidic descent fall into intelligible order;* refuse to do this, and they remain in inexplicable confusion.

When we consider the cumulative force of the preceding arguments, it becomes impossible for us to think that Lk. i. 34 f. was written at the same time, and from the same point of view, as the context in which it now stands; it is clearly a later insertion. With some reason we may hesitate to say that verse 36 does not follow naturally upon verse 35, and we may speculate whether two diverse conceptions of Sonship may not be held in the same mind at the same time of writing. But when we ponder the question of the Davidic descent; when we compare verse 34 with Lk. i. 18 ff.; when we observe the natural coherence of Lk. i. 30–3 and Lk. i. 36–8, and the radical difference in point of view between verses 34, 35 and the angelic announcement; when, in short, we have a narrative, which, if Lk. i. 34 f. was present from the first, ought to be dominated by those verses, but on the contrary does not seem to be influenced by them; we are compelled to conclude that the suspected verses represent a later insertion in the Gospel.

III.

We are in a position now to conclude from the foregoing investigation that *the Virgin Birth is not an original element in the Third Gospel.* This conclusion has been reached by two lines of argument which confirm and strengthen each other. We have seen that the one passage which unmistakably asserts the doctrine is a later insertion. Independently of this, statements have been noted in chapters i and ii, which receive no natural and satisfactory explanation on the assumption that St. Luke wrote his narrative with a knowledge of the miracle

presupposed. In the first part of this chapter we expressly refrained from pressing the view that these points in themselves absolutely forbid this assumption. But, obviously, now that we have found Lk. i. 34 f. to be a later insertion, the force of these difficulties is greatly increased. We are now entitled to say that the opinion which does least honour to St. Luke is the view that he has written cc. i, ii, while knowing of the Virgin Birth. We have to remember that not only is the Virgin Birth itself a stupendous thought, but that, if known to St. Luke, it cannot have been known long, and must therefore have preserved the freshness of its wonder. Can we, then, suppose that, while under the sway of a presupposition so despotic as this, he would straightway proceed to use such expressions as 'the parents', 'his parents', 'his father and his mother'; that, without qualification, he would speak of 'their purification'; that he would represent them astonished at the words of Simeon, and mystified by the bearing and speech of Jesus at Jerusalem? Is it credible, in short, that he should have fallen into the very ambiguities and inconsistencies, which presumably he would be anxious to avoid, and which without the slightest difficulty he could have avoided? Even if we should still hesitate to answer these questions in the negative, our conclusion, that originally the Gospel lacked the references to the Virgin Birth which we now find in it, leaves us no other option.

It should be observed that the arguments we have employed in the present chapter do not compel us to take the view that St. Luke never at any time taught the Virgin Birth. They are satisfied if we can suppose that he had no knowledge of the doctrine when Lk. i, ii was first written. To say that i. 34 f. is a correction, inserted by a redactor or reader, whose name we do not know, but who is not St. Luke, is to take two steps where we have ground for one only. All that our study entitles us to claim is that the Virgin Birth belongs to a later stratum in the Third Gospel. More than this we cannot say, until we have made a thorough linguistic and textual examination of Lk. i. 34 f., and this must be our next task.

CHAPTER III

ST. LUKE AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

WHILE, in the preceding chapter, we concluded that the Virgin Birth is a later stratum in the Third Gospel, we were unable to say to whose hand its presence is due. There was nothing to show that St. Luke could never at any time have known of the doctrine, but only that he could not have known of it at the time when he first drafted and wrote his Gospel. We are free, then, to make a new beginning, and to ask: *Did St. Luke teach the Virgin Birth?*

The question is most conveniently treated by discussing the authorship of Lk. i. 34 f. As we have seen, this is the crucial passage. If we can believe St. Luke himself to have written these verses, we must also attribute to his pen the words, 'as was supposed' in iii. 23; in a word, we must conclude that he taught the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and we must leave the question, how this result is to be co-ordinated with those reached in the previous chapter, to be considered later.

That St. Luke and no other did write these verses, is the considered view of the present writer. There are two lines of argument which converge in this direction. The first argument is *textual*, but it is more than a matter of weighing documents; the second is *linguistic* and stylistic. Neither is completely conclusive in itself, and, when taken together, they do not admit of a result so stringent as rigid demonstration. They are complementary each to the other. Either would be weakened in force in the absence of the other, but their agreement is sufficient to establish a result for which a very high degree of probability can justly be claimed.

I.

It is well known that no exception to Lk. i. 34 f. can be taken on strictly *textual* grounds. The external evidence for the

passage is practically complete. The sole exception, which only serves to throw into relief the overwhelming mass of positive evidence, is found in the Old Latin MS. known as b, which substitutes i. 38 for i. 34 and omits verse 38 after verse 37.[1]

In Great Britain, a generation ago and less, this weight of external evidence would have been thought sufficient to settle the question, and there are probably very many scholars who would still take this view. But within recent years a change has come to be discernible among leading theological writers on the general question of attestation. Much more than in former times it is now recognized that during the first half of the second century the text of the New Testament, and especially that of the Gospels, was subject to rather free handling, and the possibility has to be faced that interpolations may have crept into the text in places where formerly the external attestation would have been thought sufficiently strong.

Dr. George Milligan[2] traces the danger of textual corruption to which the New Testament writings were exposed to a threefold cause, (i) the material upon which the autographs were written, (ii) the employment of non-professional scribes, (iii) the fact that the thought of the need of absolute verbal reproduction was strange to early scribes. The last named fact led, not only to attempts to improve the grammar and to add 'explanatory words', but also to the insertion 'even of deliberate changes in the supposed interests of historic or dogmatic truth'. Milligan instances the case of Dionysius of Corinth who, 'in view of the circulation of his epistles in a falsified form', is found 'naïvely comforting himself with the thought that the same fate had befallen the Scriptures' (p. 179 n.). 'The general result', Dr. Milligan concludes, 'is, that instead of assigning textual corruption to a comparatively late date . . . everything rather points to the conclusion that, the nearer we get to the original manuscripts, the greater were the dangers to which their text was exposed' (p. 180).

[1] Cf. Moffatt (INT., p. 268 n.): 'The substitution . . . is too slender a basis, and may have been accidental, whilst the alleged omission of 34–5 from the *Protevangelium Iacobi* breaks down upon examination' (cf. Headlam's discussion with Conybeare in the *Guardian* for March–April 1903).

[2] *The New Testament Documents, their Origin and early History* (Croall Lectures, 1911–12). 1913.

In view of this position, it is important to ask whether interpolations may not exist which have left no trace whatever of their origin in the abundant documentary evidence we possess. A representative statement of this view may be found in the words of Dr. James Moffatt (INT., p. 36 f.): 'Even where the extant text does not suggest any break, the possibility of interpolations cannot be denied outright; the distance between the oldest MSS., or even the oldest versions, and the date of composition leaves ample room for changes to have taken place in the interval between the autograph and the earliest known text' (p. 38). 'The extent of interpolations varied from a word or two to a paragraph, and the motives for it varied equally from sinister to naïve' (p. 38).[1]

One argument in favour of this view may be drawn from the state of the existing MSS. and versions. The multitudinous variations which occur in these documents cannot be explained without admitting the free treatment which has been mentioned, and which was natural at a time when the Gospels were not yet looked upon as 'sacred books'. In large measure such additions as we find were drawn from floating Christian tradition, and in many cases, e.g. the *pericope adulteriae*, they probably reflect historic fact.[2] Nevertheless, they are not genuine parts of the New Testament. The further argument is an inference: if such variations from such causes occur in the MSS. and versions we possess, may there not be interpolations of which we have no external indication in the existing texts?

Stated in this way the question invites an affirmative answer, but there are other factors which have yet to be considered. As

[1] Cf. also Burkitt (GHT., p. 11): '... the text of the Gospels, the actual wording, and even to some extent the contents, were not treated during the second century with particular scrupulosity by the Christians who preserved and canonized them. There is nothing in the way which Christians treated the books of the New Testament during the first four centuries that corresponds with the care bestowed by the Jews upon the Hebrew Scriptures from the time of Aquiba onwards.' See also Blass, *Philology of the Gospels*, p. 72 f.

[2] Cf. Sanday (*Inspiration*[2], pp. 295–8): 'Possessors of copies did not hesitate to add little items of tradition, often oral, and in some cases perhaps written, which reached them' (295). See also J. H. Moulton (*From Egyptian Rubbish Heaps*, pp. 97 ff.), and an article in the *Classical Review* for March 1915 on 'The Primitive Text of the Gospels and Acts'; J. A. Robinson, *Study of the Gospels*, p. 24 f.

a matter of fact, there is little profit in a broad and general discussion. We touch the heart of the problem only when we consider the *types* or classes into which such insertions might conceivably fall. On the whole it is best, even if only for purposes of argument, to admit the possibility that insertions unmarked by signs of textual variation exist, and to ask: Of what character may we suppose these insertions to be, and can we define any limits within which they are more probable than others? In particular, is Lk. i. 34 f. a likely or probable instance? It is obvious that hard and fast lines cannot be drawn in individual cases. Nevertheless, it ought to be possible to say whether or not a passage like the one we are considering is, or is not, the work of a redactor.

Those instances of insertions, *where textual variations can be cited*, supply us with the safest criterion for other suspected cases. Of these instances many, as we have seen, were drawn from the floating tradition of the Christian communities. An interesting case is suggested by Dr. J. H. Moulton (*From Egyptian Rubbish Heaps*, p. 101 f.). He traces the saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do', to the reminiscences of the centurion who was present at the death of Jesus. 'The words are not in Luke's original Gospel, but as the great Professor Hort said in regard to the fact that these words cannot be textually defended, '"Few if any words in all the Gospels bear more intrinsic witness to the truth of what they relate than these"' (p. 103). On general grounds, it may very well be, that similar items of tradition have found their way into the existing texts, leaving the surface of the textual stream unruffled. But it is clear that, in any suspected case, the insertion could be the act of the author himself and not the reader. If the latter really is the case, the insertion must have been made very early, and must have been of such a kind as not to awaken comment or dissent.

A second kind of insertions may possibly be found in *explanatory words or phrases*, introduced with the intention of bringing out the original writer's meaning. We may take as an instance Rom. iv. 1 ('What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found?' εὑρηκέναι), where Sanday and Headlam say that they 'regard the omission of εὑρηκέναι as probable with WH. text Tr. RV. marg.' (ICC.,

Rom., p. 99).[1] In this case, however, as in so many others, the gloss, if gloss it is, is reflected in the textual evidence. Nevertheless, the possibility may be allowed, that such glosses exist even where variants cannot be cited. In these cases, however, it is clear that the insertions must have been very early and very happy, and that in specific cases their presence can rarely be conceded with complete confidence.

Yet another class of interpolations may possibly be found in certain passages in the Gospels which later conditions obtaining within the Christian Church have shaped. That later experience did interpret the words of Jesus and give the sense of them in its own terms, need not be questioned. But it should always be remembered that in any suspected case, the process may well have been complete by the time that the Evangelists wrote, and that the passage is not an interpolation at all. There are very good grounds for this opinion even in cases in which variations in rendering can be cited from patristic and other sources, as, for example, in the case of the Great Commission in Mt. xxviii. 19. This fact makes it all the more difficult to concede an interpolation where the textual record is unbroken, though again the possibility that such cases do exist may well be left open.

The cases just considered help us when we come to think of *doctrinal modifications*. As regards these, it is important to draw again a distinction which has been already made. We must distinguish, on the one hand, between those instances of doctrinal modification that are due to the Evangelists themselves, and which are in no sense interpolations, and, on the other hand, those which may subsequently have been made by later scribes or readers. Cases of the former kind unquestionably occur in the Gospels. We have only to examine the way in which the First and Third Evangelists have treated the Second Gospel, which lay before them, to be assured of this. Alterations, e. g., are made out of a sense of reverence for the person of Jesus (cf. Allen, ICC., St. Mt., p. xxxi f.). Mt. xix. 17 ('Why askest thou me concerning that which is good?'), and the changes which

[1] Cf. also Hawkins (HS[2]., pp. 152 and 197), who instances 'additions of various kinds which may be regarded as probably editorial' (p. 197) in the Second and Third Gospels. See also Moffatt (INT.), under heading 'Glosses in NT. text', p. 641, where references are given to cases treated in the body of the work.

Mk. vi. 5 f. has been subjected to, both in Mt. and Lk., will serve as illustrations.

Modifications of this kind are not, however, the sort we have specially in mind. It is the second type, those which are interpolations proper, that we have particularly to consider. The existence of these has frankly to be admitted. It is beyond question that doctrinal insertions were introduced into the text of the Gospels by later scribes and readers. The one case of Mt. i. 16 is proof positive of this (see pp. 105 ff.). If the opinion, that the original ending of our Second Gospel was deliberately suppressed, is correct, Mk. xvi. 9–20 may be cited as another instance.[1] An important qualification, however, requires to be made. In the two cases mentioned there is a conflict of textual evidence, and, as regards the latter, the objections are reinforced by the internal evidence, arising from the vocabulary, the style, and the subject-matter. The present writer must needs conclude that *the presence of textual variation is an almost necessary condition in the case of a doctrinal insertion.* It is more difficult to say how far this requirement should be pressed in the other types of interpolation which have been mentioned, but as regards doctrinal modifications the test is thoroughly legitimate. Without going so far as to pronounce it absolutely impossible, we may say that *the theory, that doctrinal insertions may exist where the extant texts show no break, is improbable in the extreme.*

In taking this view, we are not confined to the plea of the early and abundant nature of textual evidence, or to the effect of controversy in preserving the purity of the text, though these are arguments of very great weight. A sufficiently decisive factor is *the character of the existing textual variants.*[2] If authentic items of Jesus-tradition and 'explanatory words and phrases'

[1] It may, however, have been accidentally lost. See Moffatt, INT., pp. 238 ff., where the question is discussed.

[2] In this connexion it is important to remember that even early orthographic peculiarities have been accurately preserved. 'I have been much struck by the number of cases in which the old uncials preserve spellings which can be proved current in the time of the autographs, but obsolete long before the fourth century. Faithful in minutiae, they might reasonably be expected to be faithful also in greater matters' (J. H. Moulton, in an article in the *Classical Review*, March, 1915, reprinted in *The Christian Religion in the Study and the Street*, 1919, p. 153). See also the *Prolegomena*, pp. 42–56.

have not been able to enter the textual stream unnoticed, can we suppose that doctrinal modifications have breasted the waters without leaving so much as a ripple? If even an insertion like 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' has not been able successfully to conceal itself, can we believe Lk. i. 34 f. to have succeeded in doing this? Can we think that, like Melchizedek, the passage is without father, mother, genealogy and beginning of life? In asking these questions we need to recall the character of the section. It is such as radically to transform the standpoint of the chapters in which it occurs. It speaks of matters which, for a considerable time at least, were not known among the mass of Christian believers, and were never accepted by some. To suppose, then, that it is a non-Lukan doctrinal interpolation, is a flight of faith, for which those who can make it should receive the credit that is due, but of which the present writer must confess that he is not capable.

While, however, we conclude that the theory we are discussing is manifestly improbable, we have admitted our inability to pronounce it impossible in any shape and form. Provided we agree that the Third Gospel never circulated without Lk. i. 34 f., there is one point where the passage might have entered as an insertion, and that is in the interval before circulation. But even here it is difficult to suppose that the passage was added by some one other than St. Luke himself. In our entire ignorance of the circumstances under which the Gospel came to have a wider circulation, we cannot say that this supposition is inadmissible. It has a bare possibility in its favour, but not more. If a linguistic examination of the passage gave a result unfavourable to Lukan authorship, the possibility would become more significant. But if the contrary proves to be the case, then it becomes so remote as to be unworthy of serious consideration. It is because of this position that we have described the present argument as being not completely conclusive in itself, and the one line of reasoning as complementary to the other. Quite apart, however, from the linguistic argument, the difficulties which the theory of non-Lukan interpolation has to face on textual grounds are formidable.

II.

Our second task is to make *a linguistic and stylistic examination of Lk. i. 34 f.* At the beginning of the last chapter we drew attention to the importance of the test. It cannot be too strongly affirmed that any hypothesis of interpolation, which does not take account of the linguistic characteristics of the passage, is premature; indeed, it may easily turn out to be a rather glaring case of *non sequitur*.

It is precisely the linguistic test which we miss in the arguments of those who claim that Lk. i. 34 f. was not written by St. Luke. Usually it is thought enough to argue an incompatibility between this passage and its context, and straightway to assign the former to the pen of an unknown redactor. We may illustrate this method from the two articles in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* to which reference has been made. In the article on 'Mary', Schmiedel says (col. 2956): 'It has to be pointed out that even in Lk. i only two verses—vv. 34 f.—contain the idea of the virgin birth clearly and effectively; and these disturb the connexion so manifestly that we are compelled to regard them as a later insertion'. The only argument of a linguistic character is the remark: 'Note, further, that apart from i. 34 ἐπεί ('since') is not met with either in the third gospel or in Acts'. Usener writes (col. 3349): 'To Joh. Hillmann (JPT. 17, 221 ff.) belongs the merit of having conclusively shown that the two verses in Lk. (i. 34 f.), the only verses in the Third Gospel in which the supernatural birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary is stated, are incompatible with the entire representation of the rest of chaps. i and ii, and *thus must have been interpolated by a redactor*'.[1] It is theories of this kind that we have in view when we say (p. 47) that to state such a conclusion is to take two steps where there is ground for one only.

The importance of the linguistic argument is manifest in such works as Sir John C. Hawkins's *Horae Synopticae* (2nd ed., 1909) and Dr. W. K. Hobart's *Medical Language of St. Luke* (1882). It has also received great emphasis in the books in which Harnack has sought to prove the Lukan authorship and early date of the Acts, viz. *Luke the Physician*, *The Acts of*

[1] The italics are ours.

the Apostles, and *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels.*

It may not be without value to ask how far the linguistic argument can take us. We may certainly lay down the broad proposition that arguments in favour of an interpolation ought to be supported by the linguistic facts; provided, of course, that the suspected passage is susceptible of the linguistic test. We do not forget that a passage may be of such a neutral character as not to admit of that test. In that case we have to be content with other available arguments. Where, however, the linguistic test can be applied, and where the result is strongly favourable to the genuineness of the passage, that, assuredly, is a very serious objection for the theory of interpolation to face. It becomes especially formidable, if we can bring forward no evidence to prove an anachronism, or if we can allege no real textual objections. Under such circumstances, indeed, we may well adopt the rule that, in cases of this kind, we have not to do with the insertion of a redactor; unless, of course, we have good reason for saying that the interpolator has entered deeply into the original writer's style. The view here taken does not mean that all objections to a passage are sufficiently met if we can state a strong linguistic case on the other side. We shall have reason to take up this point again (p. 69). For the present it is sufficient to say that each kind of argument must be given its own particular force. In the case of a passage where objections arising from context and subject-matter cannot be gainsaid, we must conclude that the passage is of later date than its context, but not more. In a case where the facts of vocabulary, style, and subject-matter are sufficiently favourable, and no textual difficulties forbid, we must ascribe the passage to the original writer. In a case, finally, where both kinds of conditions occur, we must suppose that the passage was afterwards inserted by the writer himself into the body of his own work. Clearly, then, the linguistic examination of a suspected passage is a matter of great importance. In the case of Lk. i. 34f., it is not too much to say that it is a task as necessary as it is neglected.

It may be objected that the passage is one of two verses only, and that, in consequence, it is much too brief to allow of satis-

factory results. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the thirty-seven words of the section include several interesting phrases and points of construction, which are so important in matters of this kind. Moreover, in the case of St. Luke, we are dealing with a writer who has a very distinctive style.[1]

Harnack has recognized the force of the linguistic argument in the case of two verses (thirty-one words). These are the last two verses of the Acts. After remarking that, so far as he knows, it has never been questioned that these words come from the author of the complete work, though they have the appearance of being a postscript, he continues: 'Moreover, in content and in form they agree so closely with the Lukan style that from this point of view strong arguments can be produced in favour of their genuineness' (*Date of Acts*, &c., p. 94). In a footnote he adds the linguistic argument. This is quite enough for our purpose. It is true that the genuineness of Lk. i. 34 f. is questioned by many (on other than linguistic and textual grounds). Nevertheless, the field is open for inquiry as to whether 'in content and form they agree so closely with the Lukan style that from this point of view strong arguments can be produced in favour of their genuineness'. After all, the length of the passage is not the vital consideration, but its *character* (which may, or may not, be more striking than that of a much longer section); and this is something which can come out only after actual examination.

We turn, then, to the linguistic examination of Lk. i. 34 f. According to the Westcott and Hort text, the passage is as follows:

34. εἶπεν δὲ Μαριὰμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; 35. καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, καὶ δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅΓΙΟΝ ΚΛΗΘΗΣΕΤΑΙ, υἱὸς θεοῦ.

In treating these words, we shall not follow the order in which they occur, but the order of their importance for our investigation.[2] It is clear that the words fall into different

[1] Plummer, ICC., St. Lk., pp. xlviii ff.; Harnack, *Luke the Physician*, p. 104 f.; Moffatt, INT., p. 278 f.; Hawkins, HS[2]., pp. 15 ff.

[2] There is a well-known difficulty of punctuation in verse 35. Ought we to put a comma, with WH., after κληθήσεται? If we do so, the subj. is τὸ

classes: (*a*) according as they are neutral in character, that is to say, of insufficient importance either way in deciding the question; (*b*) in so far as they create difficulty on the assumption of Lukan authorship, and, to that extent, support the theory of interpolation; (*c*) in so far as they give clear support in favour of Lukan origin.

(*a*).

In the first class we may include the words: *ἀνήρ, καὶ ἀποκριθείς, πῶς, ἄγγελος, δύναμις, ἅγιος, εἶπεν* with dat., *υἱὸς θεοῦ*, and perhaps even *Πνεῦμα ἅγιον*.

Every one of these words and phrases is well represented in the Lukan writings, and in the case of some of them we get, on investigation, remarkable results.[1]

γεννώμενον, and *ἅγιον* is part of the predicate. If we omit the comma, the whole phrase *τὸ γεν. ἅγιον* is the subj., and the pred. is *κληθ. υἱὸς θ.* (cf. RV. marg.). Most critical editors of the Greek text omit the comma. It is probable, as the WH. type shows, that Dr. Hort was influenced by his belief that *ἅγιον κληθ.* went together as a quotation or reminiscence of the OT., and, if the passage comes from St. Luke, this is a strong argument. On the other hand, it can be argued that if the words are a Greek rendering of an Aramaic phrase it is improbable, if not impossible, that the participle should stand alone as the subj. It is not possible, of course, to settle the question by appealing to manuscript authority, as the early MSS. were practically devoid of punctuation marks. In our own case, we are unable to use either of the arguments cited, since each rests upon the assumption of the Lukan origin of Lk. i. 34 f., which is the very point we are discussing. While then we follow the WH. text we have to leave the question of punctuation an open one. If the comma should be omitted we lose the difficulty of *τὸ γεννώμενον* noted on p. 61, and we lose also the argument from its construction, sketched on p. 64.

As, in the end, we claim that Lk. i. 34 f. comes from the hand of St. Luke, we may perhaps be permitted to express a personal preference for the WH. punctuation. St. Luke's admitted fondness for OT. phraseology points strongly in this direction, while the theory of an original Aramaic document gains no increased support, but rather the contrary, as time goes by. On the one hand, Harnack has convincingly shown how much the Greek of Lk. i, ii owes to St. Luke's craftsmanship (cf. Luke *the Phys.*, pp. 102 ff.), and, on the other hand, the argument from 'Semiticisms' becomes less cogent the more we know of the papyri (cf. Moulton, *Proleg.*, pp. 13–18. See also Gr. ii. 12–20). Aramaic oral tradition may underlie cc. i, ii, but the probability is that the Greek of these chapters owes its OT. flavour to the more or less deliberate attempt of St. Luke to create an appropriate archaic atmosphere.

[1] The various computations are drawn from the *Concordance to the Greek Testament* by Dr. W. F. Moulton and Dr. A. S. Geden. In the case of St. Luke's Gospel words occurring in i. 34 f. are omitted. If these verses are Lukan, this underestimates the Lukan evidence. It would, however, be begging the question to include these verses in the present examination. Quotations and doubtful cases (except where mentioned) are also omitted.

Take the case of *ἀνήρ*. In the NT. it occurs 212 times, and of these no less than 125 appear in St. Luke's works (26 in G. and 99 in Acts), i. e. 58 per cent. Still more remarkable is the result when we compare *ἀνήρ* and *ἄνθρωπος*. Whereas the other Evangelists use *ἄνθρωπος* very frequently indeed (218 times), they employ *ἀνήρ* only 20 times. St. Luke also (especially in the Gospel) uses *ἄνθρωπος* frequently (93 times), but he has *ἀνήρ* 26 times (cf. Mt. 8 times, Mk. 4 times, Jn. 8 times). If we take both Lukan writings, the usage of *ἄνθρωπος* and *ἀνήρ* is roughly equal, whereas in the rest of the NT. it is as 9 is to 2. We can say, therefore, that St. Luke shows a liking for *ἀνήρ*, whereas Mt. Mk. and Jn. markedly prefer *ἄνθρωπος*. However, the word is so common that we can lay no stress on the fact that it occurs in i. 34, where the connexion demands it. We can only note its congruity with a Lukan liking.

Καὶ ἀποκριθείς is also interesting, though not, of course, in any way decisive. In Lk. the phrase occurs 14 times; in Mt. it is found 6 times; in Mk. 8; never in the Fourth Gospel, and never in the Acts. It occurs, that is to say, in those parts of the New Testament in which sources, probably Aramaic,[1] are employed. This is in line with the view expressed by Moulton and Milligan with regard to the aorist passive forms of the verb.[2] They say that they incline to the opinion that *ἀπεκρίθην* 'belongs only to early Hellenistic, whence it was taken by the LXX translators to render a common Hebrew phrase, passing thence into the narrative parts of NT. as a definite "Septuagintalism"'. It is in keeping with this view that *καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς . . . εἶπεν* should appear in that part of St. Luke's Gospel where most of all we have reason to posit Semitic sources, whether oral or documentary. As we have seen, half the record of this expression in the New Testament, apart from Lk. i. 35, is in the Third Gospel. The presence, then, of *καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς* in Lk. i. 35 is congruous with these facts; more, perhaps, we cannot say.

A word like *πῶς* has no bearing on our present investigation,

[1] But cf. Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, p. 24, quoted by Moulton, *Proleg.*, p. 131.

[2] Cf. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, by Moulton and Milligan, p. 65 a. See also the note at the foot of p. 131 in the *Prolegomena*: 'This phrase . . . occurs in the Semitic atmosphere alone . . .'

and the same is true of *ἄγγελος*, *δύναμις* (otherwise, however, of *δ.* in combination with nouns, &c., in the gen.), *ἅγιος* (very frequently in Lk.), *εἶπεν* (with dat.),[1] and *υἱὸς θεοῦ*.

Μαριάμ (of the mother of Jesus) occurs more often in Lk. than in other NT. writers (9 times and probably 10 in the G., once in Acts); the form *Μαρία* appears but once (ii. 19 is doubtful). In Mk. *Μαρία* occurs once, *Μαριάμ* never; in Mt. we find *Μαρία* 3 times and *Μαριάμ* probably twice. The use of the form *Μαριάμ* in i. 34 is therefore in agreement with St. Luke's usage, but of course this does not preclude the hand of an interpolator, since every instance of *Μαριάμ* (of the mother of Jesus) in the Third Gospel occurs in the first two chapters.

As is well known, the phrase *Πνεῦμα ἅγιον* is very frequently found in the Lukan writings. The percentage is as much as 60, and out of the instances in the NT., where the phrase is anarthrous, more than 50 per cent. are in St. Luke (G. and Acts). The phrase is therefore very strongly Lukan. But perhaps we ought not to include the phrase among those which tell strongly against the theory of interpolation, since a redactor would easily and naturally introduce it in the connexion in which it appears in i. 35. 'The new view was not an intruder from the sphere of heathen mythology, but a logical conclusion from the belief that our Lord was *God's Son by the operation of the Holy Spirit*' (Harnack's *Date of Acts*,[2] p. 144). We can say therefore that *Πνεῦμα ἅγιον* is admirably in keeping with Lukan usage but hardly more. The case is quite otherwise with the whole phrase, *Πνεῦμα ἅγ. ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ*, as we shall see.

Καλέω is also a word which might be considered here, for it is, of course, a very common word. Having regard, however, to the way in which it is used, it will be better to take it later.

Summing up our results thus far, we may say that we have found nothing that is out of accord with Lukan usage. On the other hand, indeed, every word and phrase we have examined is well represented in St. Luke's writings. Nevertheless, the

[1] *εἶπεν πρός* and *εἶπεν δέ* (see later) are both strongly characteristic of St. Luke's style, but *εἶπεν* with the dative is also very frequent. Taking the two works together, *εἶπεν πρός* and *εἶπεν* with the dat. are almost equally common (*εἶπ.* w. dat. having the greater number of instances). In the G. the proportion of *εἶπεν* with the dat. to *εἶπεν πρός* is 5 : 4. In Acts it is 4 : 5.

[2] The italics are his.

words are common elsewhere, and in no case do they tell decisively either way.

(*b*).

We now come to words which present difficulties, less or greater, on the assumption of Lukan authorship, and so far tell in favour of the theory of interpolation. These are—ἐπεί, γινώσκω, and perhaps τὸ γεννώμενον.

1. We introduce τὸ γεννώμενον here, because the expression, as distinct from the construction, occurs nowhere else in Lk. As a matter of fact it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament in this form. The perfect passive participle, however, appears twice in the Johannine writings: τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τ. σαρκὸς σάρξ ἐστιν (Jn. iii. 6), and ὅτι πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τ. θεοῦ νικᾷ τ. κόσμον (1 Jn. v. 4). What is more important is that there is a close parallel to τὸ γεννώμενον in Mt. i. 20, which reads, τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου. The complete clause in Lk. runs, διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται, υἱὸς θεοῦ.

It is certainly open to any one to argue that the passage in Lk. is introduced by an interpolator who is under the influence of Mt. i. 20. Why, however, while under that influence, he should so far enter into Lukan usage as to introduce the Lukan διὸ καί, and κληθήσεται, to say nothing of putting *Πνεῦμα ἅγιον* into a different connexion in a characteristically Lukan phrase (*Π. ἅγ. ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ*. Cf. Acts i. 8 and see later), are questions which it is not easy to answer. Assuredly there is not much here to support the hypothesis of interpolation, and when we consider the constructional use of the article with the participle, there is still less, if indeed anything at all. To consider τὸ γεννώμενον is rather a concession to carefulness than the acknowledgement of a real difficulty.

2. Γινώσκω must be examined, because in i. 34 it is used of knowledge in the way of marital relationship. The only parallel in the New Testament is Mt. i. 25, where, however, it is used of a man: καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν. On the other hand, in other senses, γινώσκω occurs fairly frequently in Lk. It is, however, in no sense Lukan, being distributed evenly throughout the New Testament, except in the Johannine writings, where it is very common.

We cannot, therefore, produce evidence to show that elsewhere St. Luke uses γ. in the special sense of i. 34. Nevertheless, there is no reason why he should not have written γ. in that passage, and there are considerations which go to show how he could easily have used the word.

In i. 34 and also in Mt. i. 25 γινώσκω is by no means a 'Hebraistic euphemism',[1] yet it is probable that the influence of the Septuagint is to be found in both passages. In the LXX there are several instances of γ. used, as in i. 34, of a woman. It is so used in Gen. xix. 8 (of Lot's daughters), in Judg. xi. 39 (of Jephthah's daughter), and in Num. xxxi. 17 (of the women of Midian). If, then, we are right in tracing the influence of the LXX, in i. 34, we have ground for finding the hand of St. Luke in that passage, even though he never again uses γ. in that sense. For it is just in Lk. i, ii that the influence of the LXX is most marked.[2]

Even if we do not press LXX influence (for γ. in this special sense is found 'in Greek writers from the Alexandrian age down'),[3] it is not at all apparent why St. Luke himself should not have used the word. And if the argument in favour of the theory of interpolation is to be sustained, it is scarcely enough to urge the bare fact that St. Luke does not use γ. as in i. 34 elsewhere. An idiom which occurs in Greek writers from the time of Menander[4] (B.C. 325) may well have been known to a writer like St. Luke, apart from its presence in the Septuagint. If verses 34, 35 are indeed Lukan, it is quite probable that in γ. we should find the influence of the Septuagint, but we are not at all shut up to Septuagint usage. In the connexion in which it occurs γινώσκω was a suitable word to employ, and its presence there is in no way incongruous with Lukan authorship.

3. In these verses the word which is of greatest difficulty is without doubt ἐπεί. In the rest of the New Testament it occurs 25 times. Of these 10 are found in the Pauline Epistles and 9 in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The remaining 6 appear

[1] Cf. Moulton and Milligan, p. 127 a.
[2] Cf. Harnack's *Luke the Physician*, p. 104; Moulton, *Proleg.*, p. 18.
[3] So Thayer-Grimm, p. 117, where it is pointed out that the same idiom appears in the Latin, in *cognoscere*, Ovid, *Met.* iv. 596.
[4] *v.* Moulton and Milligan, op. cit., p. 127 a.

in the Gospels; 3 in Mt., 1 in Mk., and 2 in Jn. Apart then from i. 34 ἐπεί occurs nowhere in St. Luke's works.

There are, it is true, two Lukan passages, one in the Gospel (vii. 1) and the other in the Acts (xiii. 46), where ἐπεὶ δέ occurs in some MSS. The true reading, however, in both cases is probably ἐπειδή.[1] We have, therefore, to face the fact, that not only is ἐπεί found nowhere else in St. Luke's works, but that elsewhere he seems to prefer ἐπειδή and ἐπειδήπερ (the latter in the Prologue to the Gospel, and the former five times out of the ten cases in which it occurs in the New Testament). Here is the strongest argument, which on linguistic grounds can be urged against the genuineness of i. 34 f. The richness of St. Luke's vocabulary increases the difficulty.[2] Why, if he has used ἐπεί in i. 34, he should never employ it again, is a question which it is not easy to answer. If, in view of the evidence as a whole, the case for an interpolation fails, we shall have to content ourselves with the fact, however strange, that here and here only ἐπεί occurs in Lk. A writer indeed may use a word once and never again. Ἐπεί occurs but once in Mk. (xv. 42), and it may be so here. Assuredly, in a linguistic argument room must always be left for the occurrence of ἅπαξ λεγόμενα in an individual writer. The force of this contention is, however, somewhat weakened by the preference which St. Luke seems to show for ἐπειδή, and it must be allowed that the case for an interpolation does receive support from ἐπεί.

(*c*).

We have now to consider the *third* division of the linguistic evidence. It includes the following words and phrases:

τὸ γεννώμενον (the construction),
κληθήσεται,
δύναμις Ὑψίστου,
διὸ καί,
ἐπισκιάσει σοι,

[1] So L. T. WH. In both cases WH. give ἐπεὶ δέ in the margin.

[2] There are '261 words which occur in the New Testament only in the gospel of St. Luke' (Harnack, *Date of Acts*, p. 2). Plummer (ICC., St. Lk., lii) speaks of 312 such words, but says that 52 are doubtful and 11 occur in quotations. Including Acts, according to Plummer, the number is 750 or (including doubtful cases) 851.

Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ,
εἶπεν δὲ . . . πρὸς . . .

1. We begin with τὸ γεννώμενον (the construction.) As is well known, the article with the participle is quite a characteristic of the Lukan writings. 'Participles with the article often take the place of substantives', writes Plummer (ICC., St. Lk., p. lxii). The instances given by Plummer are as follows:

ii. 27. κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον. (Here only in NT.)

iv. 16. κατὰ τό εἰωθός. (Here and Acts xvii. 2 only.)

viii. 34. ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ βόσκοντες τὸ γεγονὸς ἔφυγον. (Here and Mk. v. 14; Lk. [xxiv. 12]. Cf. also Acts iv. 21.)

xxii. 22. κατὰ τὸ ὡρισμένον. (Here only in NT. Cf. the parallel passages, Mt. xxvi. 24 and Mk. xiv. 21, where we find *καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ*.)

xxiv. 14. περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων. (Cf. Acts iii. 10.)

To these may be added xxi. 36, xxiii. 47, 48. The construction is clearly Lukan, without, of course, being exclusively Lukan, and though *τὸ γεννώμενον* does not occur elsewhere in St. Luke's works, the verb is not uncommon (10 times out of 93 in the NT., of which 40 occur in the Genealogy in Mt.).

2. Κληθήσεται. In his *Date of Acts* Harnack underlines this verb, as a Lukan trait, wherever it occurs in the 'We' Sections, which he prints on pp. 4–12. Out of the total number of cases in which it occurs in the New Testament, no less than 44 per cent. are found in the Lukan writings. In the Gospel it is present 41 times. It should also be noted that when we compare *καὶ τὸ γ. ἅγιον κληθήσεται* with the analogous phrase in Mt. i. 20, *τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου*, in the latter the Lukan *καλέω* is absent. Of course *καλέω* is a common word, but St. Luke's use of it is distinctive, and with this usage *κληθήσεται* in verse 35 agrees.

3. We have referred to *δύναμις* already,[1] and have said that while frequent in Lk., it is too common a word to be important for our present purpose. The case is otherwise with the phrase δύναμις Ὑψίστου. St. Luke is fond of using *δ.* in composition with other words in the genitive. In his Gospel, he employs

[1] P. 59.

it with *τὸ πνεῦμα*, *ὁ θεός*, *Κύριος*, *οἱ οὐρανοί*, and *ὁ ἐχθρός*. In the Acts (viii. 10) we have *ἡ Δύναμις τ. θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη Μεγάλη*. In Mt. we find this usage twice; in Mk. once; in the main epistles of St. Paul it occurs 13 times; elsewhere in the New Testament 7 times. That is to say, out of 29 instances in the New Testament (other than i. 35),[1] St. Luke has 6 (or 20 per cent.). We may therefore say that this again is a marked characteristic of St. Luke's usage, and though the phrase *δ. Ὑ.* does not occur again in Lk. (it occurs nowhere else in the NT.), it is thoroughly congruous with the Lukan style. We have also to note the word *Ὕψιστος*. Out of 12 instances in the New Testament St. Luke actually has 8, or 75 per cent. As, however, three of these occur in chaps. i and ii, it might be argued that the interpolator has introduced *Ὑ.* in verse 35 under the influence of these very chapters. That, however, he should combine it with *δ.* is interesting. Indeed, on the theory of interpolation, our interpolator has combined a distinctively Lukan word (*Ὕψιστος*) with another word (*δύναμις*) which St. Luke often uses (24 times), to produce a characteristic Lukan phrase (*δ.* in composition with a noun in the genitive)!

4. Διὸ καί. Elsewhere St. Luke uses *διό* 9 times (once in the Gospel and 8 times in the Acts). In this respect he may be compared with St. Paul, who uses the word 25 times, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who employs it 8 times. In the Catholic Epistles it appears 6 times. There is but one instance in Mt. and a doubtful case in Mk. The results are also interesting when we take *διὸ καί*. Out of 10 instances in the New Testament, St. Luke has 2 (Ac. x. 29 and xxiv. 26), St. Paul has 6, and Hebrews 2. There is not an instance in Mt. or Mk., or anywhere else in the New Testament. We are far from suggesting that no one else could use *διὸ καί*.[2] The point is that the supposed interpolator has introduced the phrase into the work of a writer who, with St. Paul and the author of Hebrews, alone among New Testament writers employs it!

5. Ἐπισκιάσει σοι. *Ἐπισκιάζω* appears in four other places in the New Testament. Of these, three are connected with the

[1] As in all these enumerations. See note on p. 58.

[2] Cf. Th-Gr., p. 152 a, and for papyri, &c., Moulton and Milligan, op. cit., p. 163 b.

story of the Transfiguration (Mt. xvii. 5, Mk. ix. 7, Lk. ix. 34). That the remaining instance should be Acts v. 15 is, in connexion with our present problem, an interesting fact. Thayer-Grimm remarks that the verb occurs in 'profane' authors, 'generally with an accusative of the object, and in the sense of obscuring'. In the Septuagint, however, it is used of the divine covering or overshadowing (cf. Ps. xc. (xci.) 4; Ps. cxxxix. (cxl.) 8; Ex. xl. 29 (35)). We have to ask whether these passages, especially the last, have influenced the writer of i. 35. We cannot assume the point, of course, but there is much to be said for it. The thought of the cloud of Yahweh overshadowing the tent of meeting may very well have shaped the thought and the phrasing of δ. Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι. If there is any weight in this suggestion (cf. Plummer, op. cit., p. 24), again it tells for Lukan authorship—so far, that is to say, as the undoubted fact that chaps. i and ii have a distinctly Old Testament atmosphere will take us. Apart, however, from such considerations it is a remarkable fact, on the theory of interpolation, that a word so rare in the New Testament, and one which St. Luke uses more than any one else, should appear in the suspected verses. Acts v. 15 (ἵνα ἐρχομένου Πέτρου κἂν ἡ σκιὰ ἐπισκιάσει τινὶ αὐτῶν) is enough in itself to raise the gravest doubt that we have here to do with an interpolator.

6. Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ. Here we have first to call attention to the verb ἐπέρχομαι. Apart from Eph. ii. 7 and James v. 1, this verb is limited to the Lukan writings, where it occurs six times (i. e. besides i. 35). We have already spoken of Πνεῦμα ἅγιον and remarked that, while it is characteristic of St. Luke, we could not lay stress upon that fact, since even an interpolator would naturally introduce a reference to the Holy Spirit in such a connexion as i. 35. If, however, as now we take the whole phrase, we come to a very different conclusion. For in Acts i. 8 we have the significantly close parallel, ἐπελθόντος τ. ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς. The parallel speaks for itself!

7. We consider lastly, εἶπεν δὲ . . . πρός. A comparison of passages in the four Gospels and the Acts gives the following results:

	Mt.	Mk.	Jn.	Lk (G.)	Acts	Lk. (G. & Ac.)
εἶπεν δέ . . .	—	—	1 (& 2 ?)	60	15	75
εἶπεν . . . πρός .	1 ?	2	9	79	26	105
εἶπεν δὲ . . . πρός	—	—	—	25	2	27

To the facts noted in the foregoing table we may add that εἶπεν πρός occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. St. Luke, therefore, has it 105 times out of 116. Still more is εἶπεν δὲ . . . πρός limited to St. Luke. No other New Testament writer uses the phrase, and St. Luke has it 27 times.[1]

In his three books on the Acts, Harnack is fond of underlining Lukan characteristics in the 'We' Sections, in order to show the linguistic identity which exists between these Sections and the rest of the work. Let us see how Lk. i. 34 f. appears, when treated in this way; not forgetting, of course, that we are dealing with two verses only. It is obviously impossible to indicate by this method the special significance of each word or phrase; this, however, has already been shown. Our results may be represented as follows: *εἶπεν δὲ Μαριὰμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, καὶ δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται, υἱὸς θεοῦ.*

A possible reply to the linguistic argument presented above is that we may have to do with an interpolator who has thoroughly entered into the Lukan style. If our examination has shown anything at all, it has shown that Lk. i. 34 f. is very far from presenting neutral features: it is shot through and through with 'Lukanisms'.[2] But, it may be asked, could not an interpolator, strongly influenced by the Lukan style, have penned these verses?

Let us see what, on that hypothesis, the interpolator has done. He has produced a passage of thirty-seven words, in which there

[1] Sir John C. Hawkins's record of πρός (used of speaking to) is as follows (HS², p. 21): Mt. 0, Mk. 5, Lk. 99, Ac. 52, Paul 2, Jn. 19, rest of NT. 4. Thus for the Lukan writings the percentage is 83·4.

[2] Moffatt's remark ('The style of 34–5 is fairly Lucan, though διό occurs only once in the third gospel and ἐπεί never', INT., 269) is surely an understatement. As we have seen διό occurs eight times in Acts.

is not a construction, and only one word (ἐπεί), which is not well represented in the Lukan writings. He has used a word (γινώσκω) in a sense not elsewhere illustrated in those works, but a word which St. Luke would naturally employ in the connexion in which it occurs. He has employed words, phrases, and constructions for which St. Luke has a fondness, such as καλέω, δύναμις Ὑψίστου, διὸ καί, the article with the participle in place of a noun (τὸ γενν.).[1] He has used two verbs (ἐπισκιάζω and ἐπέρχομαι) which are rare in the New Testament, but which St. Luke uses more than once; the phrase Π. ἅ. ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, which is closely paralleled in Acts i. 8; and, above all, the markedly Lukan εἶπεν δὲ . . . . πρός.

This feat, it must be confessed, is a striking performance. If, indeed, it has been achieved, we must conclude that it has been carried out deliberately. We make every allowance for the possibility that a redactor may well enter into the style of an author. But to suppose that in so short a passage so many Lukan features have come together without premeditation or design is all but impossible. We make bold to say that, if we must admit such an undesigned collocation of 'Lukanisms', we can have little confidence in the linguistic argument anywhere.

But can we believe that the linguistic features of Lk. i. 34 f. have been *purposely* introduced? Such a question is its own answer. No one, assuredly, would resort to the desperate expedient of supposing a redactor, who laboriously amasses Lukan characteristics, with the intention of passing off the very phraseology of his insertion as genuine. A modern interpolator might work along these lines, but not an ancient redactor. Interpolations are not forgeries. The thought of consciously reproducing stylistic features in an insertion would probably never have occurred to a redactor of the Gospels.[2]

So far then as linguistic considerations go, we must conclude that our unknown interpolator is a mythical personage. We do

[1] See, however, p. 57 n.

[2] A good illustration of this point is found in the spurious ending to St. Mark's Gospel. As Prof. E. P. Gould shows (ICC., St. Mk., pp. 301–4) out of 163 words 19 (or more than 11 per cent.) are not found elsewhere in the Gospel. They include such words as ἐκεῖνος (5 times), πορεύομαι (3 times), θεάομαι (twice). There are also two unfamiliar expressions: τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ γενομένοις (verse 10) and μετὰ (δὲ) ταῦτα.

not forget the difficulty of ἐπεί, but if Lk. i. 34 f. is a non-Lukan interpolation, we must have more support than this. Warp and woof are Lukan; only a single thread gives cause for hesitation. Must not this hesitation give way when we look at the facts as a whole? Can we strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel? Assuredly on linguistic grounds the most reasonable conclusion we can frame is that *Lk. i. 34 f. comes from the hand of St. Luke himself.*

III.

We have now to co-ordinate our results. However strong a linguistic argument may be, there is perhaps always room for the view that it is confirmatory rather than demonstrative. In the present case also, the shortness of the passage can be pleaded. In noticing this objection we urged that the character of the passage is the relevant consideration, and we think Lk. i. 34 f. meets this demand. But we have no need to press the linguistic argument to the extent we ourselves believe to be legitimate, when we find that both this argument and the textual argument point steadily in the same direction. It is this fact, that both arguments converge on the same point, which is the ultimate ground for our conclusion. Short of supplying a rigid demonstration, which should not be sought, it is sufficient to establish for us the Lukan authorship of Lk. i. 34 f.

This view carries with it at once the further conclusion that at some time or other St. Luke taught and believed in the Virgin Birth. But before we can rest satisfied with this result, we need to look more closely at *an alternative form of the interpolation-hypothesis*, to which reference has already been made (p. 36). This is the view of Kattenbusch, Merx, Weinel, and J. M. Thompson (*Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 149).

According to this theory the interpolation consists in the phrase ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω, an insertion which, it is contended, has transformed the promise of a natural conception into the prophecy of a virgin birth. Mr. Thompson notices the two forms which the theory may assume. The insertion may be either 'a modification of St. Luke's source, introduced by the Evangelist himself, as editor', or it may be 'a later addition to the text of Lk. by some person or congregation who wished to make the

miracle quite clear' (p. 149). It is obvious that, in its former shape, this hypothesis would not seriously affect our results reached thus far, provided we could agree that 'verse 35 is not inconsistent with human parentage' (Thompson, p. 148), and is best interpreted in this way. As regards the second form of the theory, the case is different. If ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω is the addition of a later reader or congregation, it is much more difficult to think that St. Luke taught the Virgin Birth. It would not be impossible; but it would leave the whole problem to rest upon the interpretation of verse 35.

We are unable to accept the theory that ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω is an insertion of unknown origin, for the following reasons:

1. *On the whole, the more natural interpretation of verse 35 is that in itself it implies the Virgin Birth.* It is easier, on this view, to explain ἐπελεύσεται and ἐπισκιάσει followed by διὸ καί. (Cf. Schmiedel, col. 2957 n.; Plummer, *St. Lk.*, p. 24 f.; Lobstein, op. cit., p. 67.)

2. *No textual evidence can be cited in support of the theory.* This is frankly admitted by Mr. Thompson, and the insertion is explained as an editorial modification. We could regard this explanation as sufficient, if the 'insertion' could be looked upon as an 'explanatory phrase', intended to sharpen a reference to the Virgin Birth, which had already been found in the context. On this reading of the problem, absence of textual variation might not be an insuperable difficulty. But if we must regard ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω as a doctrinal modification—an attempt on the part of an unknown editor to impose upon the narrative a sense quite different from that which previously it had been understood to bear—then the argument sketched in the first part of the present chapter is wholly against the theory. We cannot understand why no echoes of the earlier view have lingered.

3. *It is difficult to suppose that a later reader who sought to work up the original narrative in the interests of the Virgin Birth would have exercised such restraint.* To expand a narrative in the direction of the sense which it already bears is a conceivable suggestion. To transform it totally by merely adding four words is a theory which does not carry conviction. Was ever an interpolator so ingenious as this?

On the other side may be pleaded (1) the difficulty of ἐπεί, (2) many of the arguments we have sketched in Chapter II. The difficulty of ἐπεί we have to admit. As regards the second point, we believe that the theory we have yet to outline in the next chapter meets the case much better, without suffering from the special objections which can be brought against the view we have just discussed. For the reasons given we are unable to accept that view. We prefer to regard Lk. i. 34 f. as a unity, and to interpret both verses as implying the Virgin Birth. And as we have found sufficient reasons, both on textual and linguistic grounds, for ascribing the passage to St. Luke, we believe that he taught the Virgin Birth.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE THIRD GOSPEL

In the present chapter we must formulate a theory which shall do justice to the results obtained in the last two chapters. We have argued that the Virgin Birth is not an original element in the Third Gospel, that several passages in it are inconsistent with the doctrine, and that Lk. i. 34 f. is a later insertion. On the other hand we have given reasons for our belief that St. Luke really did write the passage just mentioned, and that in consequence he taught the Virgin Birth. It is useless, we think, to set these results against one another; they are not contradictory. The argument from the linguistic and textual facts will not make one iota of difference to those derived from the treatment and subject-matter of Lk. i, ii, and the latter will not in any way impair the former. Writers who hold fast to the view that St. Luke wrote i. 34 f. have not, in that one contention, answered their opponents, and critics who plead for the hypothesis of non-Lukan interpolation travel much too fast. The final theory must take all the facts into account.

I.

So far as we ourselves are concerned, there is only one hypothesis open to us, and it is not far to seek. It will be best if we first state it somewhat baldly, leaving obvious difficulties to be considered later. The theory is as follows:

In the first instance St. Luke wrote his Gospel, either in whole or in part, without any knowledge of the Virgin Birth. To him, as to the compiler of the Lukan Genealogy, Jesus was the son of Joseph and of Mary. St. Luke's estimate of Jesus was not less high than that of St. Paul and St. Mark, but, as was probably true in the case of each of these writers, no tradition of the Miraculous Birth had reached him. He looked upon Jesus as

the Child of Wondrous Promise, and for his analogies he turned to the Old Testament to the stories of Isaac and of Samuel.

In contrast to earlier writers St. Luke had an excellent Birth-tradition at his disposal. According to his sources the coming and future Messianic greatness of Jesus had been divinely foretold. His birth was heralded by angelic choirs, and humble shepherds brought their meed of worship and of praise. By an insight divinely given, men like Simeon and women like Anna saw in Him the child of promise. He was to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel. We need not stay to look more closely into the story, which doubtless has been worked up as regards its form by the Evangelist's hand. Suffice it to say that St. Luke's picture is that of a Wondrous Birth, supernaturally foretold; not a virgin birth.[1]

Some time after he had penned his narrative, possibly after it had been dispatched to Theophilus, but at any rate before the Gospel gained a wider circulation, St. Luke received the tradition of the Virgin Birth. At what time and from what source the story reached him we are quite unable to say; possibly it was from some reader or readers to whom he had submitted his narrative; possibly the story travelled along some independent channel. In any case the probability is that the tradition was imparted to St. Luke by some one who claimed to possess a fuller and a better account, and whose claim the Evangelist respected and admitted. Having regard to St. Luke's standing and methods as an historian, we prefer to believe that the tradition reached him through a definite and *personal* channel, than to suppose that of his own initiative he freely altered a valuable source out of deference to a growing theory.

The historical value of the new information is a question we are not now considering. It is part of our theory, however, that it satisfied the mind of St. Luke; to him the Virgin Birth was historic fact. Probably the story appealed to him at once as a fitting explanation of the unique personality of Jesus. It was

[1] If we could accept the view that 'seeing I know not a man' in verse 34 is St. Luke's only insertion, and that he wrote verse 35 from the first without thought of the Virgin Birth, his point of view would then be somewhat different. On this theory his thought would be that while born of Joseph and Mary the promised child was none the less supernaturally conceived. See p. 69 f.

a tradition rich in doctrinal possibilities; it provoked reflection, and it answered questions.

The Evangelist saw at once that the story must find a place in his narrative. Fortunately it was not too late, and fortunately again there was a point where it could be included without entailing the necessity of rewriting cc. i, ii entirely. He had only to insert the words we have now in i. 34 f. into the address of the angel, and to add to the opening words of the Genealogy the phrase 'as was supposed', to obtain a narrative in which truths previously unknown to him found sufficient statement. If we can suppose that the adaptation of what he had previously written was not drastic enough, we obtain a hypothesis which at least does justice to every result we have yet secured.

The view that Lk. i. 34 f. is an interpolation made by St. Luke himself was put forward by Zimmermann in *Studien und Kritiken* (p. 273 f.) in 1903. His treatment (cf. Moffatt, INT., p. 269 n.) differs in several respects from that outlined above. Zimmermann posits an Aramaic Jewish-Christian source which described a natural birth, and suggests that it was in the course of translating this document that St. Luke added i. 34 f. The Evangelist is also credited with having altered i. 27 and ii. 5, so as to describe Mary as betrothed to Joseph. Zimmermann also explains ii. 22 (*αὐτῶν*) as a mistranslation, and ascribes to St. Luke the parenthesis of ii. 35 a, and the chronology of iii. 1–2, which he holds is inaccurate.

According to this hypothesis St. Luke must have been acquainted with the Virgin Birth *before* he began to translate the supposed Aramaic document. This view is encumbered with difficulty; for, if Zimmermann is right, we should certainly expect a much more drastic editing of the document than can be shown. The extent to which this difficulty appears in the case of our own theory is one for which we think that justification can be given.[1] In the case of Zimmermann's hypothesis the obstacle is too great. On this view we cannot understand how the Evangelist allowed himself to write down those expressions which are incompatible with the Miraculous Conception.[2]

The view we have preferred agrees with that of Zimmermann

[1] See later pp. 78–84.
[2] Cf. V. H. Stanton (GHD., ii, p. 226 f.).

in positing a source or sources which described a natural birth. It differs from it in denying that the Evangelist knew of the Virgin Birth at the time when he made use of those sources. We prefer to think that it was after cc. i, ii had attained what is substantially its present form in Greek, that St. Luke came to hear of the Virgin Birth, and that it was then that he inserted i. 34 f. This supposition includes the positive advantages of Zimmermann's theory, and it agrees better with the existing literary phenomena of Lk. i, ii.[1]

II.

In holding the view we have outlined, we have no thought of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. Our theory is not intended as an eirenicon. It is not an attempt to make the best of two worlds, the critical and the dogmatic. If we appear to have introduced the Virgin Birth into the Third Gospel by the back door, after we have bowed it out at the front, this is simply because the evidence leaves us no alternative. Our theory makes room for the twofold fact, as it seems to us, (1) that the Virgin Birth is not an original element in the Third Gospel, and (2) that St. Luke wrote the one passage in the Gospel which asserts the doctrine; thus for us it is inevitable.

If, from another point of view, our hypothesis seems a bold venture, we may justly claim that the facts are such as to demand a bold treatment. Nor is it a sufficient objection to say that the theory is complex. Life is a complex thing, and there are few times when we need to remember it so much as when we are thinking of the production of an historical work.

Apart from other claims which can be made, our theory has

[1] As regards the remaining details of Zimmermann's hypothesis, none of them is really necessary to our theory. We believe that what St. Luke actually wrote in ii. 5 was 'with Mary his wife' (see pp. 32 ff.). But his new information did not compel him to alter this to 'with Mary who was betrothed to him', though later readers thought the change was necessary. Nor was it required to alter i. 27. Even in the original narrative (i.e. on our theory, before i. 34 f. was added) the passage may have read as we have it now, the prophecy being regarded as uttered previous to marriage. There is no real need to regard 'to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph' as an interpolation in the interests of the Virgin Birth, either (with Harnack) on the part of a redactor, or (with Zimmermann) on the part of St. Luke himself.

one important, if general, advantage; it takes account of the elementary facts of human composition. Have we given sufficient thought to the fact that a writer like St. Luke may well have turned back to review, and even to alter, in the light of further information, what he had already written? Is not this what nearly every one does who writes or relates anything at all? Is it not indeed rather a rare than a usual proceeding to write a story from start to finish without insertion, omission, and revision?

In his 'Introduction' Dr. James Moffatt has drawn attention to these things, and especially as they concern St. Luke's two works. He shows that interpolation may take place 'either (*a*) at the hands of the author himself, or (*b*) by subsequent editors of the volume, after the writer's death, or (*c*) by scribes (or editors) of the text' (p. 36). Under (*a*) he refers to instances in Aeschylus, Herodotus, Vergil, Juvenal, Martial, and Lucretius. 'Several passages in the *De Rerum Natura* (e. g. ii. 165–83) are also to be explained most naturally as additions made by Lucretius himself to the original draft, and in the case of the Third Gospel or its sequel it is not unlikely that Luke may have re-edited . . . his work' (p. 37). Dr. Moffatt gives a very interesting modern example in the case of *Northanger Abbey*, which was first composed by Jane Austen in 1798. 'In the fifth chapter, however, we have an allusion to Miss Edgeworth's *Belinda*—a novel which did not appear until 1801. This proves that Miss Austen's work lies before us in a revised form; the first draft was gone over by the authoress before its final publication some years later' (p. 37).[1]

It will scarcely be denied that the possibility of interpolation by an original author has often been overlooked by many critics. They are not slow to find the insertions of later readers and scribes, but often it seems tacitly to be assumed that the original writers must have written with logical and almost unerring precision. Curiously enough, something like the Verbal Inspiration of Scripture is required to justify some of the critical results reached. This is a doctrine long since discredited, but being

[1] Cf. *Ox. Studies in the Syn. Prob.*, pp. 417, 420, where the Rev. N. P. Williams, M.A., suggests that certain passages in Mk. may be later insertions, made 'possibly by St. Mark himself'.

dead it yet speaks. It will have to be allowed, we think, that mechanical theories of Inspiration have not yet left us free to perceive those ordinary conditions of writing under which the New Testament writers wrote. The aftermath of Verbal Inspiration still blinds us to the commonplaces of composition.

Of all New Testament authors St. Luke is perhaps the last to have issued his works without modifications. The high art which is self-evident in a modern writer like Robert Louis Stevenson was not attained without corrections, substitutions, redrafting, and rewriting. Without drawing the parallel too closely, and without impugning his real inspiration, we may well credit some of these processes to St. Luke. This, however, is an argument we cannot press too far, for, as will be seen in the following section, there is good ground for the belief that St. Luke's revision of his work was never complete. It is sufficient for our hypothesis to find room for a measure of revision and for the presence of modifications required by new information.

The nature of St. Luke's task is an added reason for expecting these processes. In his Preface (i. 1–4) St. Luke shows a desire to produce a full and accurate record, and claims to have traced the course of all things from the first. Any new information bearing upon the Birth and the hidden years of the Infancy would be especially welcome to him. Any one, moreover, who has had anything to do with collecting memoirs knows that not infrequently new facts come to hand just when the task seems well-nigh completed, facts for which a place must be found, however great the difficulties may be.

We are not indeed left entirely to conjecture. We can examine St. Luke's treatment of the Markan record. The modifications which he introduces are manifest, and they arise in different ways. Many of them are stylistic, others are intended to clear up difficulties, while it is in every way probable that others again are corrections introduced as the result of new information. If, from such causes, St. Luke does not hesitate to modify the statements of St. Mark's Gospel, it is inconceivable that he would have refrained from altering his own narrative if occasion should arise.

We have at least one definite example, within St. Luke's works, of a story which has been modified in the light of further

information. In Lk. xxiv there is good ground for thinking that the final parting of Jesus from His disciples is not described as an Ascension, and apparently it takes place at the close of Easter Day. In Acts i we have the story of a forty days' interval, during which the Risen Christ teaches His disciples the things concerning the Kingdom of God (i. 3). The Ascension is described as an act of visible levitation. Jesus is taken up into heaven and a cloud receives Him out of His disciples' sight (i. 9). As they stand gazing upwards two men appear by their side clothed in white garments, who declare that Jesus shall return in like manner as they beheld Him going into heaven (i. 10 f.). The disciples then return to Jerusalem. It can hardly be denied that this is a totally different story from that which is told in Lk. xxiv. Whatever its historical value may be the presumption is that it rests upon a tradition which had come to St. Luke's knowledge after he had completed his Gospel. Apparently he acquired his new information when it was too late to alter his earlier work. Otherwise we may believe that the story would have appeared in the Gospel and not in the Acts.

It may freely be granted that the foregoing considerations are of a purely general character. Admittedly they do not prove that Lk. i. 34 f. is a specific instance of modification. Our justification of this hypothesis is the results we have reached in Chapters II and III. What we have just urged, however, is sufficient to show that our theory is not by any means inherently impossible, but is consonant with St. Luke's procedure and methods as a writer.

III.

We have now to consider what is perhaps the strongest objection to which our theory is exposed. It may be stated as follows:

If the Virgin Birth is a later element in the Third Gospel introduced by St. Luke himself, the Evangelist's revision of cc. i, ii might reasonably have been expected to be much more thorough than it is. Why, for example, does he leave untouched the references to Joseph and Mary as 'the parents' of Jesus? Why does he not qualify his ambiguous reference to 'their'

purification? Why is he still untroubled by their astonishment, and by their failure to understand the words of Jesus at Jerusalem? Why does he not insert some clearer reference to the Davidic descent of Mary, or at least give us reason to believe that he looked upon Jesus as the adopted, and therefore legal, son of Joseph? Why does he leave the Sonship mentioned in the first part of the angel's speech (i. 31–3) apparently of a purely Messianic character? Why does he not provide occasion in the Annunciation for the terms of Mary's question in i. 34? In short, are we not back again face to face with the same difficulties with which our investigation opened? These are some of the difficulties which our theory raises.

In reply to this objection there are two preliminary considerations to be borne in mind. They are not arguments in the sense of things which can be proved; they are rather possibilities which ought seriously to be taken into account.

(1) In the first place it should be recognized that *we may not have all the details of St. Luke's actual reconstruction before us.* Something may have been altered or excised; we have the result; we may not have all the stages. Usener (EB., col. 3350) has asserted that statements of fact have actually been omitted from the original narrative; he is even able to tell us what they are! He thinks that we can 'infer with certainty' that in the original form of the narrative after i. 38 stood the further statement that Mary was then taken to wife by Joseph and that she conceived by him. Usener suggests that this statement was 'judged inadmissible' by the redactor who interpolated i. 34 f., and that in consequence it was expunged. There can be little doubt that reasoning such as this requires omniscience as well as intuition! And the same criticism would be just in reply to any one who should elect to tell us exactly what St. Luke himself has altered or omitted. These are things which we do not know, and which we cannot know; we cannot even 'infer with certainty' that St. Luke has omitted anything at all. But the broad possibility that he may have effected transformations and modifications in cc. i, ii, which we cannot now trace, is quite another matter, and, indeed, is by no means improbable. And if this is so, must it not affect the judgement we pass upon the skill or lack of skill which, on the theory proposed, St. Luke has shown? We may not know all.

Obviously, we cannot prove this, but it is a consideration which we ought to have in mind.

(2) A second thing to be remembered is that, if our theory is true, *we do not know anything of the actual circumstances under which the new tradition was introduced into the Gospel; it may have been in haste.* Did the story reach the Evangelist at the last moment? Or, if not, was there a process of sifting and testing of the new information, which left little time when at length the fateful decision was taken, and the Evangelist took up his pen? Again we cannot prove these things, but again we cannot deny them. And if we cannot deny them, we must not ignore them. Only if we do ignore these possibilities, are we at liberty to insist that the reconstruction should have been more drastic. If, as we ourselves think, the supposition is reasonable, that i. 34 f. was added when the Evangelist had only just heard of the Virgin Birth tradition, we have clearly a good answer to the objection we are considering.

The foregoing arguments are speculative; there are, however, more positive considerations to urge. In addition to what has been said, we may point out (3) the fact that *St. Luke's writings left his hand without a painstaking final revision*, and (4) *the different effect upon the mind of a new piece of information as compared with a belief, which has been held for some time, and has already become an intellectual presupposition.*

(3) *That St. Luke's writings left his hands without a final revision is strongly supported by the literary phenomena of the two works.* The clearest evidence is found in the Acts, in which we probably have a closer literary parallel to the Birth Stories of Lk. i, ii than in the rest of the Gospel itself. Writing on the Acts (*Acts of the Apostles*, Eng. Tr., pp. 203 ff.) Harnack gives a list of more than two hundred 'instances of inaccuracy and discrepancy'. Harnack does not accept them all, and shows that they are of different types, many of them being comparatively trifling and unimportant. Some are cases of anacoluthon and of transition from indirect to direct speech and vice versa. There are also 'cases where St. Luke introduces persons with a certain unconcern, or in other places seems to forget that he has already introduced them' (p. 230). Harnack points out that 'the details of a story are here and there inserted

later or again earlier than their proper place' (p. 227), and he asserts that 'instances of redundancy, of awkward repetition, of silence upon important points, and of extraordinary brevity, can be adduced from different parts of the book' (p. 230). He finds 'instances of discrepancy' in the three accounts of the conversion of St. Paul, the letter of Claudius Lysias, the report of Festus, the last speech of St. Paul at Rome, and in other passages (p. 231).

Adequately to enter into this very interesting question would take us too far beyond the limits of our main subject. It is perhaps not unfair to suggest that Harnack's long list, as given in pp. 203–25, is capable of very considerable reduction. There is great force in Ramsay's remark: 'He who reads Luke without applying practical sense and mother-wit and experience will always misunderstand him', and in his caution: 'When you think you find an "inconsistency" in Luke, you should look carefully whether you have been sufficiently applying these qualities, before you condemn the supposed fault' (*Luke the Physician*, p. 55). Ramsay himself admits, however, that there are inconsistencies which cannot be denied, and holds that they show that 'the work never received the final form which Luke intended to give it, but was still incomplete when he died' (ib., p. 24). In his earlier work, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, Ramsay has made the same suggestion, illustrations of which he finds in Acts xvi. 19, 20 and xx. 4, 5.[1]

We may describe the impression which St. Luke, as a writer, makes upon us by saying that, while his work is marked by great literary art, and while it is characterized by many striking instances of historical accuracy, yet, at the same time, the

[1] In Acts xvi. 19, 20 it is said that the owners of the demented girl 'seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the agora before the magistrates'. The words which immediately follow are: 'and bringing them to the presence of the praetors, they said . . .' Ramsay's comment is: 'The expression halts between the Greek form and the Latin . . . as if the author had not quite made up his mind which he should employ. . . . It is hardly possible that a writer, whose expression is so concise, should have intended to leave in his text two clauses which say exactly the same thing' (*St. Paul*, p. 217 f.). In reference to Acts xx. 4, 5, Ramsay writes: 'In verse 4 we have probably a case like xvi. 19 f., in which the authority hesitated between two constructions, and left an unfinished sentence containing elements of two forms' (ib., p. 289). He adds that the sentence 'perhaps never received the author's final revision'.

Evangelist shows a certain unconcern in matters of detail (Harnack would call it 'a certain literary carelessness'), the results of which would probably have disappeared had he subjected his works to a close final revision. If this view is just there is little weight in the objection that, on the theory we have stated, St. Luke's reconstruction might have been expected to be more drastic than it is. The inconsistencies he has left are like those which we find elsewhere and are a feature of his works as they stand.

(4) Our final argument is of a psychological kind. It rests, as we have said, upon *the difference between an intellectual prepossession and the first effect upon the mind of new information.*

The previous argument might seem to point in another direction. Will not the character of St. Luke's writings sufficiently explain the literary phenomena of Lk. i, ii, on the view that he taught the Virgin Birth from the first? In the light of the discrepancies which occur in the Gospel and the Acts, can we not believe that after all the Virgin Birth is an original element in the Gospel? This contention would be an example of what Harnack has called attempting to gather apologetic figs from sceptical thistles.[1] We do not think that in this case the harvest would realize expectations.

It must be remembered that the two cases are not parallel. In the one case we begin with a writer whose mind is filled with an intellectual presupposition, with a knowledge, that is to say, of the Virgin Birth presupposed. Under these circumstances the miracle must be 'a necessary stone in the structure', and its effect determinative. If the Virgin Birth had been known to St. Luke for some considerable time, we cannot think that Lk. i, ii would have possessed the features to which we have called attention in Chapter II. In the other case—that of our hypothesis—the Virgin Birth is a piece of new information, and, if this is so, we submit that inconsistencies left in the adapted narrative wear a different hue. It is one thing to introduce into a narrative what is inconsistent to one's presuppositions. It is quite another thing not to perceive inconsistencies at once, when our knowledge is enlarged by a totally new fact. A presupposition is much more despotic than a subsequent discovery.

[1] Cf. Loofs, *What is the Truth about Jesus Christ?*, p. 122.

It is common knowledge that the implications of a new point of view are not always immediately recognized. For a time old and new live together. It is not by any means an easy task to introduce into a narrative, constructed under the guidance of alien presuppositions, a fact of an entirely new order. That St. Luke should have performed his task so well argues no little skill in literary craftsmanship. That his work was not completely done is after all no more than we might expect. From the standpoint of literary exactitude, no doubt the better plan would have been to rewrite the narrative, or at least to subject it to a rigorous pruning. But we ought not to complain if these things have not been done. St. Luke was probably too much of an artist to feel the merciless logic of his new information; and the result is a compromise.

In connexion with our theory we do not think that this is an unreasonable view to take. The difficulties are certainly much greater upon the theory that St. Luke knew of the Virgin Birth from the first. Granted certain presuppositions, and we can say with good reason what a writer like St. Luke would not be likely to do. Assume the entrance of a new fact, transforming by a whole world of difference the writer's point of view, and who can say just what he would do? We can say, of course, that he would introduce his new knowledge, if persuaded of its truth; but when we come to the details of reconstruction, we are face to face with the uncertainties of the personal equation. The logical procedure is drastic revision. If the writer stops short of this, as he may very well do, and attempts to fuse his material, seams must show and markings remain. This is precisely what we find in Lk. i, ii. In i. 34 f. and its context we can detect the seams; in c. ii we can see the markings.

It will be recognized that the situation is quite different on the view which credits i. 34 f. to a later Christian editor. Against this theory the objection we are considering has much greater force. For it is unlikely that the redactor would approach the Gospel with a knowledge of the Virgin Birth but lately gained. On the contrary, it would probably be a doctrine with which he had long been familiar. Accordingly, in addition to the other objections that we have raised against the theory of late interpolation, it would be legitimate to ask, Why has the redactor

not done his work better? Our own hypothesis—that St. Luke had only just entered into a knowledge of the new tradition—is, indeed, the one theory where we have the least need to ask this question.

For the reasons given, we believe that the objection that St. Luke's revision should have been more drastic is not insuperable. That there is difficulty we allow. But there is probably no solution of the Lukan problem, not even the correct one, which will not leave difficulties of a kind. The problem is complex and the facts often elusive. It is on the ground that the theory we have sketched leaves least difficulties, and does justice to the facts as they appear, that we venture to find in it a reasonable solution of the problem of the Virgin Birth in relation to the Third Gospel and to St. Luke.

IV.

It remains for us to consider certain consequences which follow if our hypothesis is true.

(1) In the first place, *we can claim St. Luke as a witness to the tradition of the Virgin Birth.* This is a result of first importance. For those who regard St. Luke as a very credulous person with a special 'fondness' for 'a good miracle', this conclusion will mean little. But for those who are impressed by his claim to be regarded as a good historical writer, it is not a view to be lightly esteemed. There are those who will consider that St. Luke's witness settles the historical question, and will be disposed on the ground of his authority to accept the tradition. But with greater reason there are others who will feel that, with all his excellences as an historian, St. Luke has the elementary human right to make a mistake, especially when he is dependent upon the evidence of others. The determining feature is clearly the character of his source or sources.

(2) A further fact to be noticed is that *St. Luke's witness marks a very early stage in the spread of the Virgin Birth tradition.* In this respect there is a contrast between the Third and First Gospels. In the Third Gospel the tradition is stated, but its problems are scarcely felt. There is a foreshadowing of this in the words 'as was supposed' in the Genealogy, but not more. St. Luke has not really felt the problem of the Davidic descent.

He has not envisaged that very striking treatment of the problem which we shall have occasion to point out in the Matthaean Genealogy (see pp. 89 ff.). St. Luke's narrative is neither didactic nor apologetic. It is almost, but not quite, a simple narrative of what is implicitly accepted as fact. In making this qualification we are thinking of the artistic form which the earlier narrative embodied in Lk. i, ii has imposed upon St. Luke's account of the Virgin Birth; but this is a matter which will come up again a little later. The fact that is of outstanding interest is that St. Luke could sit down to write a Gospel, with a desire to trace out all things accurately from the first, and yet know nothing of the Virgin Birth, until after the greater part, if not the whole, of his work was completed.

(3) *It is the fact just noted which helps us to date the first appearance of the Virgin Birth tradition; its date is bound up with the question of the date of the Third Gospel.* This is a question which will receive further treatment in our final chapter (pp. 117 ff.).

(4) *Our hypothesis postulates an earlier narrative of the Birth of Jesus which knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. The relation of this narrative to the later tradition needs carefully to be considered.*

We have already expressed the opinion that the earlier narrative was probably taken from a good historical source. Ramsay has noted signs of a womanly spirit in the whole narrative, and thinks that it may well go back either to Mary, or to some one who was very intimate with her (cf. *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*, pp. 74–88; *Luke the Physician*, pp. 13, 50). Sanday is not able to speak quite so confidently as to the nearness of the source to Mary, but thinks that it could not be 'more than two or three degrees removed from her'. 'It must have been near enough', he says, 'to retain the fine touches which Professor Ramsay so well brings out' (*Outlines*, p. 195 n.). These views have won considerable support in Great Britain. It will be remembered, of course, that they have regard to the whole of Lk. i, ii, to the narrative, that is to say, as an account of the Virgin Birth. The same arguments are valid, however, for ascribing a good historical foundation to the narrative, even if i. 34 f. is a later addition. The probability is that the source, whether documentary or oral, is of Palestinian origin, and that it

points back ultimately, if not immediately, to the Holy Family. On our theory, however, while silent as to the paternity of Joseph, the source had nothing to say of the Virgin Birth. It described the non-miraculous birth of the long-expected Messiah.

At first sight the high historical value of this earlier source would appear to be detrimental to the tradition of Lk. i. 34 f. But it is not certain that this is so. There is more force than has often been allowed in the suggestion that the facts of the Virgin Birth may have been purposely withheld from public knowledge for many years by those who knew them.[1] Assuming for the moment the truth of this view, we may ask, *Would nothing at all be told?* If we think it probable that part at least of the story would be related, it may be that the tradition upon which St. Luke first drew is a version of that part. We might even hazard the suggestion that it was the publication of this story by St. Luke which drew out the fuller narrative. In other words, the fact that the earlier tradition makes no reference to the Virgin Birth need not be fatal to the truth of the later story expanded in i. 34 f. This, of course, is speculation; but, at any rate, the possibilities are such as to forbid the specious argument —the Holy Family know nothing of the Virgin Birth! We tread upon firmer ground when we urge that the higher the historical value of the earlier story the less likely would St. Luke have been disposed to modify it in deference to further information, unless he had attached considerable value to the new tradition, and was persuaded of its truth.

(5) As regards *the origin of the Virgin Birth tradition implied in Lk. i. 34 f.*, we have to confess that we are completely in the dark. We have stated our preference for the view that it came through a personal channel (p. 73). We are unable to think that in writing i. 34 f. St. Luke was himself merely translating theology into narrative. But who the intermediary was we cannot tell. On our theory, the tradition cannot have been

[1] Speaking of the late appearance of the Virgin Birth tradition G. H. Box writes (op. cit., p. 137): 'Its comparatively late appearance and primitive character can only be reconciled by the explanation that it is based upon facts which were for long treasured within a narrow circle in close contact with our Lord, and which were only gradually divulged to the Church.' Cf. also Sanday, *Outlines*, pp. 193, 196.

directly imparted to the Evangelist by Mary. Whether, in the end, the story can be traced back to her, is a question we cannot now discuss. At this stage it would be no more than a guess to connect it with the women mentioned in Lk. viii. 2, 3 ; xxiv. 10, or with the daughters of Philip (Acts xxi. 8, 9). In an historical inquiry it is never safe to ascribe a tradition to an authority, unless we have solid grounds for so doing. Otherwise, we import a bias into the investigation, if indeed we do not beg the question. The mistake is one which has been made more than once in discussing the Virgin Birth. In the present case we have nothing whatever to guide us, and accordingly we have to acquiesce in the bare conclusion that St. Luke accepted the Virgin Birth tradition, but that we do not know anything about his authority, except that it satisfied his mind.

(6) The *form* in which the tradition reached St. Luke can hardly have been the brief statement of i. 34 f. The literary form of that passage is determined by that of the earlier narrative. The latter, as we have said (p. 73), is something more than a bare transcript of events. It is a product of high art, and is shaped upon Old Testament models. Ramsay finds in it a Greek element. The story has been 're-thought out of the Hebraic into the Greek fashion' (*Luke the Physician*, p. 13). The divine messenger becomes to St. Luke 'the winged personal being who, like Iris or Hermes, communicates the will and purpose of God' (op. cit., p. 13). Having regard, however, to the Old Testament birth-stories of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, it is doubtful if we really need this suggestion. In any case, we may say that it is the mould in which the earlier story has been cast, which accounts for the literary form of the Virgin Birth tradition in Lk. i. 34 f. The tradition which St. Luke received probably contained the substance of what is stated in verse 35, and asserted that Jesus was begotten of Mary by the Holy Spirit.

(7) The historical value of the Virgin Birth tradition in the Third Gospel is a question which cannot be answered until the problem is treated as a whole. Our study of the Lukan problem adds to the material at our disposal. It confirms our conclusions in Chapter I as regards St. Paul and St. Mark. It also enables us to say that *St. Luke, in his later years, came to believe and teach the Virgin Birth, on grounds which are unknown to us, but which he himself deemed sufficient.*

CHAPTER V

THE VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE FIRST GOSPEL

MORE than the other Synoptic Gospels, the First Gospel comes before us as an 'official' document of the Christian Church. Our Third Gospel was somewhat of the nature of a 'private venture', and how inadequately the value of St. Mark's Gospel was recognized in the first half of the second century appears in the fact that its survival seems almost accidental, all existing copies being derived from a single mutilated MS.[1] Whether, then, we can claim the authority and sanction of the First Gospel for the Virgin Birth tradition, is clearly a question of first-rate importance. To some the question will appear determinative; but for those also, who feel that in any case the historical value of the witness would remain an open question, a conclusion as regards the problem is of very great significance, in view of its historical implications.

In the present chapter our purpose is to inquire how far the First Gospel bears witness to the Virgin Birth, and what the character of its witness is. Was the narrative, as we have it to-day, present in the Gospel from the first? Is Mt. i, ii a later insertion, or is the passage i. 18–25 an interpolation? Extremely interesting discussions have also arisen around the question of the Matthaean Genealogy and the true text of Mt. i. 16, and these call for notice. The question of the historical value of the tradition of Mt. i. 18–25 must in the main be postponed, but the possibilities, and such positive facts as emerge, can be noted.

Perhaps the best method of approach is to consider first the character of the Genealogy, apart altogether from the question of its authorship. The details of the textual problem of Mt. i. 16 will be discussed in an Appendix to the chapter. The remaining points to be treated are the genuineness of cc. i, ii, the unity of

[1] Cf. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, pp. 260, 274 f.

these chapters, and lastly the sources and implications of the narrative, together with a survey of the results reached.

I.

The Characteristics of the Genealogy.

Among the features which mark the Genealogy we may note the following:

(1) *Its purpose* is to show the Davidic descent of Jesus by tracing the royal line (cf. verse 6 'David the king').

(2) *The structure is obviously artificial.*[1] The Genealogy is arranged in three groups of fourteen generations, an arrangement to which the writer himself calls attention (verse 17). In order to secure this structure, the names of Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah are omitted (cf. 1 Chron. iii) and the third group covers a space of about six hundred years. 'If any source of the schematism is wanted, the cabbalistic interpretation of דוד, whose three letters are equivalent by gematria to the number 14, is the most probable' (Moffatt, INT., p. 250 n.).

(3) The verb ἐγέννησεν is used throughout of legal, not physical, descent.[2] This inference is drawn from the artificial character of the Genealogy. Its omissions are obvious, and must have been so both to the compiler and his readers. 'The contemporaries of the Evangelist knew their Bible at least as well as we do. They knew that there were more than fourteen generations between David and the Captivity, that Joram did not beget Uzziah, and that Josiah did not beget Jeconiah' (Burkitt, *Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, p. 260). If the passage Mt. i. 18–25, as well as the Genealogy, comes from the hand of the Evangelist, the verb ἐγέννησεν must clearly indicate legal parentage; but there is sufficient ground for this view within the Genealogy itself.

(4) The references to women in the Genealogy are unique, and are best explained as due to an apologetic purpose. They cannot be so well explained as reflecting a universalistic interest (Heffern, quoted by Moffatt, INT., p. 251). In contrast to the Genealogy in the Third Gospel, that in Mt. traces the descent no farther

[1] Cf. Burkitt (*Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, ii. 260); Moffatt (INT., 250); Box (*The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, p. 12); Sanday (*Outlines*, p. 201).

[2] So among others Westcott, Burkitt, Box, Allen, Barnard, A. J. Maclean, Moffatt.

back than to Abraham; it is fundamentally Jewish. There can be little doubt but that the writer's purpose is to rebut Jewish slanders already current regarding the birth of Jesus. 'Throughout the whole Genealogy the Evangelist appears to be telling us in an audible aside that the heir had often been born out of the direct line or irregularly. Thamar the daughter-in-law of Judah, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, and the unnamed wife of Uriah, are forced upon our attention, as if to prepare us for still greater irregularity in the last stage' (Burkitt).[1]

If these are the characteristic features of the Genealogy, it is clear that *from the first it was compiled with the Virgin Birth presupposed.* It is, in fact, an attempt to present that belief in connexion with the claim that Jesus was of Davidic descent, through the legal relationship in which He stood to Joseph.[2] Thus, the Matthaean Genealogy is unique; it differs altogether from that in Lk. If to us its form seems forced and unreal, that is because we fail to come to it from the historical point of view. From this standpoint we may ask, with W. C. Allen (ICC., St. Mt., p. 6): 'If the editor simply tried to give expression to the two facts which had come down to him by tradition—the fact of Christ's supernatural birth and the fact that He was the Davidic Messiah, and did not attempt a logical synthesis of them, who shall blame him?' We are not here concerned with the question of the truth of the Virgin Birth tradition, but simply with the view that the compiler of the Genealogy held that belief, and for this inference a high degree of probability can be claimed.

If this is the character of the Genealogy, it must follow that *the textual problem of Mt. i. 16* differs considerably in importance from the thought of a quarter of a century ago. It is becoming increasingly recognized that, whatever the true text of Mt. i. 16 may be, it can make little difference to the character of the Genealogy as outlined above. Its interest is textual and literary rather than historical. The most interesting statement of this

[1] *Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, p. 260. Cf. also Allen (ICC., St. Mt., p. 5); Box (ib., p. 14); Moffatt (ib., p. 251).

[2] 'It is merely an embodiment, in genealogical form—a form specially calculated to appeal to Jewish readers—of the idea that Jesus belonged, through His relation to Joseph, to the royal family of David' (Box, ib., p. 15).

point of view is that of F. C. Burkitt in his *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe* (1904, see vol. ii, pp. 258 ff.). On p. 258 Burkitt expresses a firm belief that no fresh light upon the historical events of the Nativity has been thrown either by the discovery of the Sinaitic Syriac MS. or by the publication of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*. He says (p. 261) that even if the Genealogy had ended with the uncompromising statement 'and Joseph begat Jesus', it would not prove that its compiler believed that Joseph was the actual father of Jesus. In this connexion it is of great interest to note that Archdeacon Allen, who upholds the historical truth of the Virgin Birth, actually adopts in his commentary on Mt. (ICC., 1907) the reading implied by the Sin. Syr., as the true text of Mt. i. 16—'And Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph, to whom was espoused Mary a virgin, begat Jesus, who is called Christ' (p. 5). Writing in 1916, Canon Box takes a different view of the textual problem, but is no less emphatic in his assertion that, 'even if the reading *Joseph . . . begat Jesus* be correct, it need not imply a belief in the natural generation of Jesus' (*The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, p. 15). Lastly, we may compare the judgement of Dr. James Moffatt (INT., 1918): 'Such modifications as may be due to doctrinal presuppositions are designed to re-set or to sharpen the reference of the original text to the virgin birth, not to insert the dogma in a passage which was originally free from it' (p. 251). These are great and honoured names, but the opinion is not one which cries out for the cloak of authority; it springs directly out of the character of the Genealogy itself. If ἐγέννησεν is used throughout of legal parentage, it would clearly be so in the last step, if it should be proved that this also contained the word ἐγέννησεν. Indeed, we should naturally expect to find that word in verse 16.

At the same time, it would not be right to regard the textual problem as one of merely academic interest. It gives a valuable sidelight upon the history of the exegesis of Mt. i, ii in the early Christian centuries. It enables us to see how the Matthaean narrative was viewed, the difficulties it raised, and the way in which they were met. Thus it throws into strong relief the unique character of the Genealogy. It also sheds a welcome light upon the treatment which the text of the Gospels received at the hands of their earliest readers before these writings had

acquired the status of sacred books. Even then if we have finally to acquiesce in Dr. Moffatt's statement: 'The textual problem of i. 16 is not yet settled', the question is one of absorbing and of fruitful interest.[1] For our immediate purpose it is enough to say that the results, so far as they go, strengthen rather than weaken our belief that the compiler of the Genealogy worked under the presupposition of the Virgin Birth.

II.

The Genuineness of Mt. i, ii.

This problem can no longer be regarded as a burning question. Few scholars of the present day would contend that the First Gospel ever circulated without these chapters. In style, in vocabulary, and in mode of treatment, they are of a piece with the rest of the book.

(1) The *literary style* of the First Evangelist is not so marked as that of St. Luke, but it has nevertheless a distinct character of its own. As compared with that of St. Mark, it is 'more prosaic and colourless', but it is 'more calm and balanced' (Milligan).[2] Prof. Burkitt describes it as follows: 'I wish I could think of some other word than "formality" by which to name the chief characteristic of the First Evangelist's literary style. Formality suggests rigidity, generally with a certain measure of incapacity, and these are not among his defects. On the contrary, Matthew has great literary skill, as well as dignity. Everything that he says is put with admirable clearness and lucidity; what he writes down he has first understood himself. If there is an exception to be noted he notes it' (GHT., p. 186). Now this same style is manifest everywhere throughout the Gospel, in cc. i, ii, as well as elsewhere.[3] The theory therefore that these chapters are a later insertion labours under an immense initial disadvantage. It requires to be explained how it is that this characteristic literary

[1] See Appendix to present chapter.

[2] *The N. T. Documents, their Origin and early History*, p. 148. W. C. Allen (op. cit., p. lxxxv f.) seems to emphasize the more negative aspects of the writer's style, but calls attention to phrases and constructions which are said to be 'strikingly characteristic of the Gospel'. Cf. Moulton, *Gk. Gr.*, ii, p. 29.

[3] Cf. Burkitt (GHT., p. 184 f.)

style is just as manifest in cc. i, ii as in the rest of the Gospel, in spite of the fact that the subject-matter of these chapters is peculiar and distinct.

(2) The *Vocabulary* and constructional forms of cc. i, ii are also characteristic of the Gospel as a whole. Burkitt (*Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, p. 259) instances eight words from these chapters as 'characteristic Matthaean words'. These words are given below. The statistics have been obtained by tracing the record of the words in Moulton and Geden's *Concordance* (doubtful cases and quotations being omitted).

	Instances in Mt. i, ii.	Instances in Mt. iii–xxviii.	Instances in the rest of the NT.
ἀναχωρεῖν . . .	4	6	4
λεγόμενος (with names)	2	11	Mk. (1), Lk. (2), Jn. (8), Ac. (2), Pl. (4), Heb. (1).
ὅναρ	5	1	0
πληροῦσθαι . . .	4	8	13
ῥηθέν	4	8	0
σφόδρα . . .	1	6	4
τότε	3	86	67
φαίνεσθαι . . .	4	9	9

In addition to the list given by Burkitt, we may note also the following:

	Instances in Mt. i, ii.	Instances in Mt. iii–xxviii.	Mt. as compared with the rest of the NT. (approximately).
παραλαμβάνειν . .	6	10	$\frac{1}{3}$ of NT. Record.
προσκυνεῖν . .	3	9	$\frac{1}{4}$,, ,,
προσφέρειν . .	1	13	$\frac{1}{14}$,, ,,
συνάγειν . . .	1	23	$\frac{2}{25}$,, ,,
ὄριον . . .	1	5	$\frac{1}{2}$,, ,,
θησαυρός . . .	1	8	$\frac{1}{2}$,, ,,
δῶρον . . .	1	8	$\frac{1}{2}$,, ,,
ἐπάνω . . .	1	7	$\frac{2}{5}$,, ,,
χρυσός . . .	1	4	$\frac{1}{2}$,, ,,

Other words which repay examination are κατοικεῖν, ὅπως, ἐνθυμέομαι, ἐξετάζω, τελευτάω.

The argument is not, of course, that no one but the First Evangelist could have used these words—that would be absurd; but that they are words which he uses frequently, and in nearly every case more frequently than any other New Testament writer.[1]

[1] Sir J. C. Hawkins points out (HS[2]., p. 9) that the 'characteristic' words and phrases of Mt. are 'used considerably more freely in these two chapters than in the rest of the book'.

An interesting fact is instanced by W. C. Allen (op. cit., p. lxxxvi). He notes as a characteristic of the Gospel 'a tendency to repeat a phrase or construction two or three times at short intervals'. Fifteen examples of this are given, one of which occurs in Mt. ii. This last is an instance in which the genitive absolute is followed in three cases by *ἰδού* (ii. 1, 13, 19). We may add that the same construction appears in i. 20. Sir J. C. Hawkins shows (HS[2]., pp. 5, 31) that there are seven instances of this construction in the rest of Mt., as compared with a single case in Lk. One other detail of construction may be noted. More than half the New Testament record of *ἕως ἄν* with the subjunctive (which occurs in ii. 13) belongs to the First Gospel.

On the other side, we have to set down the fact that in Mt. i, ii there are some twenty-eight words, exclusive of proper nouns, which do not occur in the rest of the Gospel.[1] But nearly half of these are accounted for by the subject-matter. The remaining instances are not more numerous than we might naturally expect. On the other hand, if cc. i, ii are a later insertion, we could reasonably look for more.

So far, then, as the linguistic facts will take us, we may say that, considered as a whole, they support the view that Mt. i, ii are from the same hand as the rest of the Gospel.

(3) The *mode of treatment* in these chapters is that of the First Evangelist. This writer is distinguished by the marked interest which he takes in describing the new faith as the true fulfilment of the old. This characteristic appears in the quotations which he makes from the Old Testament. Among these there are twelve which stand out distinct.[2] (i) In each case they are preceded by the words, 'in order that that which was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled', or words to that effect. (ii) With one exception (iii. 3), they are quoted in this Gospel alone. (iii) What is more important, most of them are based upon the Hebrew, whereas the remaining quotations in the Gospel (except

[1] *ἀκριβόω, ἀκριβῶς, ἀναιρέω, ἀνακάμπτω, βασιλεύω, βίβλος, γένεσις, γινώσκω* (in sense used), *δειγματίζω, δεκατέσσαρες, διετής, ἐπάν, θνήσκω, θυμόομαι, κατωτέρω, λάθρᾳ, λίβανος, μάγοι, μεθερμηνεύομαι, μετοικεσία, μνηστεύομαι, πυνθάνομαι, σμύρνα, συνέρχομαι, τελευτή, τίκτω, ὕπνος, χρηματίζω.*

[2] i. 22 f., ii. 5 f., ii. 15, ii. 17 f., ii. 23, iii. 3, iv. 14 ff., viii. 17, xii. 17–21, xiii. 35, xxi. 4 f., xxvii. 9. Of these iii. 3 differs somewhat from the rest, and ii. 23 cannot be identified with any single OT. passage.

xi. 10) are taken from the Septuagint.[1] For our present purpose the significant thing is that these characteristic quotations are distributed throughout the whole of the Gospel. No less than five of them occur in cc. i, ii, and it is not too much to say that their presence is a kind of water-mark authenticating the genuineness of these chapters.

Combining the foregoing arguments we may justly claim that the hypothesis of interpolation is violent in the extreme. Dr. Moffatt sums up a very widely accepted view when he says: 'Neither the style nor contents of 1–2 afford valid evidence for suspecting that they are a later insertion in the gospel' (INT., p. 250).

III.

The Unity of Mt. i, ii.

The arguments used in the preceding section are sufficient to show that cc. i, ii, as a whole, come from the Evangelist's hand. But this conclusion does not exclude the possibility that certain parts may be of later date. In particular, it could be said, and has in fact been claimed that the Genealogy, the passage i. 18–25, or both, are interpolations; and that originally the First Gospel knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. These questions must now be treated.

There is not the same need for us to examine the section describing the visit of the Wise Men and its sequel (c. ii). This section is of great importance in a discussion of the Nativity narratives, but in relation to the Virgin Birth it is secondary as compared with the Genealogy and the passage i. 18–25. The section is treated by Canon Box in *The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, pp. 19–33.

1. *The Genealogy.*

We are not concerned to ask at this point whether the Genealogy ever existed independently of the Gospel, and is thus a source which the Evangelist has worked up and incorporated in his own work. The question we have to consider is whether Mt. i. 1–17 is a genuine part of the Gospel.

The case in favour of this view is overwhelmingly strong. Its

[1] See especially Stanton (GHD., ii, p. 343); also Allen (op. cit., p. lxii) and Burkitt (GHT., pp. 124 ff.).

weight lies in the fact that the peculiar characteristics of the Genealogy (p. 89 f.) are the peculiar characteristics of the rest of the Gospel.

(1) This is manifest in the strong interest taken in the Davidic Sonship. 'The Gospel according to Matthew may be called *The Book of Jesus Christ, the Son of David* . . . The special aim of Matthew, in one word, is to represent our Lord as the legitimate Heir of the royal house of David' (Burkitt, *Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, p. 259). We may partially illustrate this claim by the New Testament record of the term 'Son of David'. There are 8 instances in Mt. other than i. 1, and 6 in the rest of the New Testament (3 in Mk. and 3 in Lk.). The regal aspect of Christ's Sonship is also illustrated in Mt. xix. 28, xxv. 34 (cf. Allen, op. cit., p. lxiv).

(2) As regards the artificial structure of the Genealogy, we may note that this too is characteristic of the First Evangelist's manner. He is fond of arranging his material in groups of threes. Allen enumerates twenty-three instances outside cc. i, ii (ib., p. lxv). Similarly the double seven reflects 'the author's penchant for that sacred number' (Moffatt, INT., p. 250, who notes four other examples (p. 257)).

(3) We are unable to illustrate from the rest of the Gospel the legal use of γεννάω, but where else save in the Genealogy could we expect to find it? It is the unique character of the Genealogy which requires that usage. On the other hand, the point of view which determines the usage is the point of view of cc. i, ii as a whole. As in i. 1–17, so in i. 18–ii. 23, the standpoint is that of a writer who desires to combine two diverse beliefs, the Virgin Birth and the Messiahship of Jesus.

(4) The apologetic motive manifest in the Genealogy is also characteristic of the First Gospel. Not only is the same motive present in every section of cc. i, ii, but in other connexions and in every part of the Gospel, the desire to defend and to interpret is evident; notably this is the case in the story of the Baptism, the account of the Guard at the Tomb and the Resurrection narratives.[1]

[1] Cf. Burkitt, op. cit., ii. p. 259; Box, op. cit., pp. 11, 19 ff.; Moffatt, INT., p. 259; Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 178 ff.

(5) The nature of the Genealogy leaves little room for the linguistic test. 'Yet even here we have the characteristic λεγόμενος in *v.* 16, and the objective way that the writer speaks of "the Christ" in *v.* 17 is quite in the manner of Mt. xi. 2' (Burkitt, op. cit., p. 259).

Taken together these arguments justify us in concluding that Mt. i. 1–17 comes from the Evangelist's pen.

2. *The Passage Mt. i. 18-25.*

It is this passage which leads us to the heart of the whole question, for here, in the angelic message to Joseph, the Virgin Birth is asserted unmistakably.

We should be justified in making use of the results we have already obtained. If the Genealogy comes from the hand of the Evangelist, and if it is of the character we have alleged, there can be no question but that Mt. i. 18–25 is also a genuine part of the Gospel. In view, however, of the importance of the section, it may be well not to avail ourselves of this argument.

Schmiedel's objections to the passage (EB., col. 2959 f.) may not unfairly be summarized as follows: (i) Mt. xiii. 55 ('Is not this the carpenter's son?') 'directly contradicts the theory of the Virgin Birth', (ii) Mt. ii can be understood without presupposing the story, (iii) Bethlehem is not mentioned until ii. 1, (iv) Mt. i. 18–25 is not from the same hand as the Genealogy, which 'could never have been drawn up after Joseph had ceased to be regarded as the real father of Jesus'.

Of these arguments the last arises out of Schmiedel's view of the Genealogy, which is, that in its original form in the Gospel it asserted the physical paternity of Joseph (the Virgin Birth being a later insertion). Needless to say, on this view, Mt. i. 18–25 must be rejected. We have already discussed the nature of the Genealogy, and have seen reason to take a totally different view of it. The Genealogy, as we understand it, furnishes no ground of objection to i. 18–25, but rather the contrary. Nor do Schmiedel's remaining objections carry the weight claimed.

(1) As we have observed on p. 31, Mt. xiii. 55 simply reflects the opinions of our Lord's contemporaries. Unless we make the gratuitous assumption that the Evangelist would never have

reflected a view which he did not himself share, we are not justified in raising an objection to i. 18–25 from this particular passage.

(2) As regards c. ii, it is true that what is there related can, if necessary, be understood without presuming the story of i. 18–25. Nevertheless, the chapter is quite congruous with what is told in that passage, and, indeed, agrees better with the presupposition of the Virgin Birth. In a narrative written from the standpoint of Joseph, we may note that, while Mary is spoken of no less than five times as the mother of Jesus (ii. 11, 13, 14, 20, 21), wherever Joseph is mentioned, we have invariably the quite neutral expression 'the young child' (ii. 13, 14, 20, 21). Also the quotation, 'Out of Egypt did I call my son' (ii. 15), by the very reason of its exegetical violence, is more intelligible if the Evangelist has already narrated the story of the supernatural birth. To have real weight, Schmiedel's objection should be able to point to more than the fact that c. ii can be read 'without the presupposition of the virgin birth'. If i. 18–25 is an interpolation, we might reasonably expect statements in c. ii inconsistent with that passage. And, moreover, it would be gratuitous to say that they have been carefully suppressed, in view of those which survive in Lk. i, ii to which we have called attention in Chapter II.

(3) That Bethlehem is not mentioned until ii. 1 is true. But as an objection to i. 18–25 this fact would be of significance, if the latter were simply a narrative of the birth of Jesus. But to assert this is to mistake its character, which is didactic and apologetic. Joseph rather than Jesus is the central figure of the section; the birth is not announced until the closing words. The reference to Bethlehem in ii. 1 is certainly abrupt, but it would have been quite as abrupt in i. 25. Nothing in i. 18–25, if we have regard to its character, requires a reference to Bethlehem within the passage.

The onus of proof really rests upon those who deny the genuineness of i. 18–25. It may not be without advantage, however, to set down reasons which lead us to believe that the passage comes from the Evangelist's hand.

(a) As in the case of Lk. i. 34 f. there is *no textual authority for the omission of these verses.* While we recognize the free

handling which the text of the Gospels may have received during the first half of the second century, it does not appear likely on general grounds that Mt. i. 18–25 is an interpolation. The addition to the text of a saying of Christ, or of a comment, or even of an incident drawn from floating Christian tradition, we can understand, as well as a certain amount of stylistic alteration. 'Doctrinal modifications', however, of such a wholesale character as the present instance would be, if the passage is a later insertion of unknown origin, are quite another matter. That Mt. i. 18–25 should have been inserted in a Gospel, which, on this theory, taught the physical paternity of Joseph, and should have been inserted without leaving traces in the literature of the early Christian centuries, is most improbable. The sole support from early Christian literature is the statement of Epiphanius that the text used by Cerinthus lacked the passage. Had we more information of this kind, there would be ground for the theory of interpolation; as it is, the basis is too slender and uncertain.[1]

(b) *The standpoint and mode of treatment in Mt. i. 18–25 is that of cc. i, ii, and of the Evangelist.* As in the rest of cc. i, ii, it is the didactic and apologetic interest that is uppermost. Joseph is the central figure, and there is the same use of 'the machinery of dreams' as in c. ii, and in the story of Pilate's wife (xxvii. 19).

(c) *The same may be said of the vocabulary and the style.* Six words appear which are not found elsewhere in the Gospel,[2] but with the exception of one (*μεθερμηνεύομαι*), they are sufficiently explained by the peculiar subject-matter. On the other hand, there are at least five 'characteristic Matthaean words',[3] while other features distinctive of the First Evangelist appear in the opening words of verse 20, the reference to Joseph as the 'son of David', the phrase 'Behold, an angel of the Lord', and

[1] For the reference to Epiphanius see an article by F. C. Conybeare, HJ., i, p. 96. Conybeare's main argument is drawn from the edition of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, published by himself (1898). He thinks that the Dialogue 'reflects an age when [Mt. i. 18–25] had already been introduced, but was not present in all the copies' (p. 100). If we accept the view advocated by F. C. Burkitt (*Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii. 265) this inference is not necessary. See Appendix to present chapter, p. 106.

[2] *Γινώσκω* (in sense used, but the phrase in which it occurs is probably an insertion, Burkitt, ib., ii, p. 261), *δειγματίζω*, *μεθερμηνεύομαι*, *μνηστεύομαι*, *συνέρχομαι*, *ὕπνος*.

[3] *Ὄναρ*, *παραλαμβάνειν*, *πληροῦσθαι*, *ῥηθέν*, *φαίνεσθαι*.

especially the quotation of verse 23 with its introductory formula.

In view of these arguments, it is not too much to apply to Mt. i. 18–25 what Burkitt says of Mt. i. 18–ii. 23. If the passage 'be not an integral part of the First Gospel, it must be counted one of the cleverest of literary adaptations, a verdict that is not likely to be passed on it by a sane criticism' (op. cit., ii. 259).

IV.

Implications, Sources, and Results.

(1) In the earlier sections of this chapter an attempt has been made to prove that the Virgin Birth is an original element in the First Gospel. The suggestion that it is a later insertion from an unknown hand breaks down on examination, and our conclusion is that the doctrine was taught by the First Evangelist. There is no need to raise the question whether the doctrine was a later element introduced by the Evangelist himself into a work which originally knew nothing of it, for there is absolutely no evidence pointing in that direction. In this respect the passage Mt. i. 18–25 differs altogether from Lk. i. 34 f. Against the former passage no inconsistencies, either in the immediate context or in the Gospel as a whole, can be shown. From one end to the other the narrative is governed by the same presuppositions and reflects the same point of view.

Whether the Genealogy ever existed independently and in another form is a view for which little can be said. There are no grounds for this theory within the Genealogy as it stands, and the textual problem of Mt. i. 16 does not require the supposition (see pp. 105 ff.). The possibility cannot, of course, be excluded. If the Evangelist did make use of an existing Genealogy, it was probably one which implied the real paternity of Joseph. In that case he has completely transformed it, and must have done this either before, or at the time when he first wrote cc. i, ii. But the existence of such a source is pure speculation. It is more probable that the Genealogy is the Evangelist's own composition, constructed not for historical but for didactic purposes.[1]

[1] 'I cannot believe that any document underlies it. On the contrary,

(2) The question of *the implications of Mt. i, ii* is one of great interest. The narrative is very far from being an attempt to relate the story of the Virgin Birth for the first time. On the contrary, it is probable that the doctrine was already known to the readers of the First Gospel, and that it had become a subject of controversy. It is from this point of view that the Evangelist writes; it is for this reason that he tells the story from the standpoint of Joseph. It is not difficult to imagine the circumstances under which the Matthaean narrative came to be written. Once the story of the Virgin Birth had begun to circulate, interest must soon have been aroused in the position and attitude of Joseph. How were his natural fears allayed? What action did he take? What became of the Davidic descent? Such questions would press for answer. Outside the Christian community these difficulties would inevitably become the occasion of scandal, as the case was in later times. The Evangelist's narrative is an attempt to meet these difficulties. His view, or the view he reflects, is that the fears of Joseph were allayed by a divine message. The subsequent action of Joseph, also under angelic direction, was to complete the legal act of wedlock before the child was born. The difficulty of the Davidic descent is the problem attacked in the Genealogy. According to several writers it is the same interest which governs the narratives of c. ii. '. . . the Nativity Story shows us the alarm of the usurper Herod, when he learns that the legitimate ruler has been born within his dominions. As Saul tried to kill David, so Herod tries to kill Jesus; and Jesus finds a refuge in Egypt, as David found a refuge among the Philistines' (Burkitt, op. cit., ii. 259; cf. Box, op. cit., p. 19).

(3) The question of *the source or sources* from which the Evangelist obtained the narrative of Mt. i. 18–25 cannot be adequately discussed in itself and in relation to the First Gospel alone. Nevertheless it is worth while to ask how far we can go within those limits. From the evidence supplied by the Gospel itself, we cannot say that the narrative rests on the testimony of Joseph. If the Virgin Birth is historically true, this view has

I believe it is the composition of the Evangelist himself' (Burkitt, *Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, p. 260). Cf. also Allen (ICC., St. Mt., p. 5).

much probability in its favour. But to urge such an origin for the Matthaean narrative, as part of the proof for the Virgin Birth, is not permissible, since obviously it begs the question. Many writers think that the narrative really does come from Joseph himself because it reflects his standpoint. Amongst others this is the opinion of Bishop Gore (*The New Theology and the Old Religion*, p. 126 f.), and of Dr. Orr (*The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 83 ff.).[1] Such a conclusion travels beyond the facts of the case. That the narrative is written from Joseph's standpoint is, of course, beyond question. It may be, however, that this fact is sufficiently accounted for by the apologetic character of the narrative. We do not say here that this is the case, but we do say that to claim more is to put an outside interpretation upon the narrative. Eventually this is, of course, inevitable; our final conclusion reacts upon our view of the earlier problems; but in the constructive stage this is a peril sedulously to be avoided.

The possibility has to be allowed that the narrative of Mt. i. 18–25 may be the result of an inference which arose within the Christian community, and which has clothed itself in an imaginative and pictorial form. In answer to the question, How were the fears of Joseph allayed?, it would be natural to reply, By a divine message, and current beliefs would supply an explanation of the means and the method by which such a message would be conveyed. Angelic mediation would account for the one, just as revelation by a dream would explain the other.

The presence of *inference* in the Synoptic narratives is perhaps not so widely recognized as it ought to be. Whether we ought to be so ready as we often are to suppose the existence of special information, documentary or oral, when the First Evangelist and St. Luke add details to the Markan narrative, or relate entirely new facts, is a pertinent question. In many cases there is much justice in the supposition. In other cases it may easily be that the new detail or narrative has been shaped by inferences playing upon difficulties or ambiguities left by earlier narratives and

[1] Sanday (*Outlines*, p. 196) writes: 'In regard to the Matthaean document we are in the dark. The curious gravitation of statement towards Joseph has a reason; but beyond this there is not much that we can say. It would not follow that the immediate source of the narrative was very near his person.'

traditions.[1] This would be a perfectly natural circumstance, the existence of which would be more readily acknowledged if obsolete theories of Inspiration did not continue to exact unlawful tribute. In the case of the First Gospel this use of inference is sometimes manifest, especially in the accounts of the Burial and the Resurrection of Jesus.[2] Whatever judgement may be passed upon Prof. Kirsopp Lake's brilliant examination of the Resurrection narratives, there can be little doubt but that he has shown that inference, as well as information, shaped the formation of early Christian tradition. This conclusion, even if accepted, would not justify us in supposing that the narratives of Mt. i, ii are nothing more than the inferential resolution of difficulties left by the story of the Virgin Birth. But it would suffice to make it probable that, to an extent which we may leave undefined, inference did play its part, either in the mind of the Evangelist or in the thought of the Christian community.

It is, indeed, quite possible to admit this view, and yet to hold that behind the narrative there is a nucleus of historic fact. Dr. Gore, who believes that the story goes back to Joseph, does not hesitate to say :

'. . . to suppose such angelic appearances . . . to be imaginative outward representations of what were in fact real but inward communications of the "divine word" to human souls, is both a possible course and one which is quite consistent with accepting the narrative as substantially historical and true' (*Dissertations*, p. 22 f.).

Canon Box expresses a similar view when he writes:

'To us [the narrative] seems to exhibit in a degree that can hardly be paralleled elsewhere in the New Testament the characteristic features of Jewish Midrash and Haggada. It sets forth certain facts and beliefs in a fanciful and imaginative setting, specially calculated to appeal to Jews. . . . The task that confronts the critical student is to disentangle the facts and beliefs—the fundamental ground-factors on which the narration is built—from their decorative embroidery' (op. cit., p. 12).

[1] 'In the historical judgement of the Gospels this distinction between facts and reflections has frequently to be remembered' (E. P. Gould, ICC., St. Mk., p. 37).

[2] See *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, by Professor Kirsopp Lake.

From what has been said above it will be seen that, if we restrict ourselves to the First Gospel, there are three theories possible regarding the source or sources employed in i. 18–25. (i) The narrative, very much as it stands, may have come from Joseph himself. (ii) Inference and imagination may have played upon a nucleus of historic fact. (iii) The narrative may be a story without historic foundation, which has grown up, as the result of inference and imagination, in answer to difficulties arising out of a belief in the Virgin Birth antecedently held.

So long as we confine ourselves to the Gospel, it is not possible to choose between these views, unless we are prepared to assume that early Christian tradition cannot have been mistaken—an assumption which cuts the knot instead of untying it. As we are not ready to make that assumption, we have to be content to leave the possibilities open, and to regard the use of any one of them in the historical inquiry as illegitimate. In part this is a disappointing decision, but it is better to feel that we have solid ground beneath our feet.

(4) The positive results to which we have been led are (i) that *the First Evangelist knew of, and believed in, the story of the Virgin Birth*; and (ii) that *the belief was shared by his readers, and had been held sufficiently long for some of its problems to be raised.* Unquestionably, this is an important result, and its place in the historical problem will fall to be considered later.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER V

THE TEXTUAL PROBLEM OF MT. i. 16

I.

Important and well-known discussions of the textual problem of Mt. i. 16 are those of Sanday (*Outlines*, pp. 197–200); P. W. Schmiedel (*EB.*, col. 2961 ff.); F. C. Burkitt (*Evan. Da-Meph.*, ii, pp. 258–66); W. C. Allen (*ICC.*, *St. Mt.*, p. 8); G. H. Box (*The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, pp. 215–18).[1] For purposes of reference, the most important facts may be summarized as follows:

(A) First, we have the *text followed in the A V. and R V.*, which reads: *Ἰακὼβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσὴφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός.* This is the text of all extant uncials, very many minuscules, and many versions (Sanday). 'It is definitely attested by Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, § 20' (Burkitt).

(B) A different text is attested by the '*Ferrar*' *Group*. It is implied by a number of important MSS. of the *Old Latin Version*, by the *Armenian*, and by the *Curetonian Syriac*. This text is as follows: *Ἰακὼβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσὴφ ᾧ μνηστευθεῖσα παρθένος Μαριὰμ ἐγέννησεν Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον Χριστόν.*

(C) Thirdly, we have the *Sinaitic Syriac*. *Syr.-Sin.* reads: 'Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called Christ', and implies *Ἰακὼβ δὲ ἐγ. τὸν Ἰωσήφ· Ἰωσὴφ* [*δὲ*] *ᾧ μνηστευθεῖσα* [*ἦν*] *π. M. ἐγέννησεν Ἰ. τὸν λεγ. X.* (Burkitt, p. 263). [The reading of the *Syr.-Cur.* is: 'Jacob begat Joseph, him to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, *she* who bare Jesus the Messiah'.] We may also mention here the passage from the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* which Conybeare claims to be the true text of Mt. i. 16. The alleged quotation includes the text as given under (A) together with the words, 'And Joseph begat Jesus who is called Christ'.

[1] Unless otherwise stated further references to these writers are to the works cited above.

II.

(1) Conybeare's claim, mentioned above, has failed to win general acceptance. It is rejected by Schmiedel,[1] who justly asks, 'How can we suppose that an evangelist deliberately added the second half to the first?' (col. 2961). Schmiedel's view is that in the passage cited from the *Dialogue* 'it is precisely the youngest text and the oldest which have found a place peaceably side by side in one and the same line'. F. C. Burkitt's theory probably gives the best explanation. He does not think that '*And Joseph begat Jesus who is called Christ*' is meant to be a part of the quotation of Mt. i. 16, but is simply the inference of the Jew. '*The Jew quotes the Genealogy and then draws his inference, which is of course repudiated by the Christian disputant*' (p. 265). Accepting this view we may leave the supposed quotation outside our discussion. We may note, however, that, according to Burkitt, the second of two other quotations of Mt. i. 16 in the *Dialogue* is interesting 'as affording an actual proof that the phrase "*husband of Mary*" was liable to change' (p. 265).

(2) G. H. Box regards the *Curetonian Syriac* as 'an interpretation rather than a translation of the Greek text given us by the "Ferrar" Group' (p. 216). Burkitt thinks it is 'like an attempt to rewrite the text of *S*' (p. 263), but as he derives the *Syr.-Sin.* from the same Group,[2] his opinion leads to the same result. Directly or indirectly *Syr.-Cur.* is a witness for the text (B). As such its general character in Mt. i, ii needs to be taken into account. In i. 20 it has 'thy betrothed' instead of 'thy wife'; It omits 'her husband' in i. 19. In i. 24 it substitutes 'Mary' for 'thy wife'. In i. 25 it shares with the *Diatessaron* the reading 'purely dwelling with her', and it renders ἐκάλεσεν by 'she called'. It is clear that its text is *dominated by a desire to assert unmistakably the historic fact of the Virgin Birth.*

(3) W. C. Allen takes the Greek text implied in the *Syr.-Sin.* to be the true text of Mt. i. 16. Burkitt, as we have seen, derives it from (B). For the present it is important to consider *the*

[1] Cf. also Moffatt, p. 251; Sanday (*Outlines*, p. 197); W. C. Allen, p. 8.

[2] 'The reading of *S* itself I have come to regard as nothing more than a paraphrase of the reading of the "Ferrar Group", the Syriac translator taking ᾧ to refer to ἐγέννησεν as well as to μνηστευθεῖσα' (p. 263).

character of the Syr.-Sin. in relation to the Virgin Birth. In i. 21, with the *Curetonian*, it adds the words, 'to thee'. In i. 25 it omits 'knew her not until', and, as in the English versions, it renders ἐκάλεσεν by the masculine; in the same verse it also has the reading, 'she bore him a son'. At first sight it would appear as if the tendency of the MS. is in direct opposition to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth; it is, however, very questionable if this is the case. It is not improbable that 'he knew her not until' (omitted also by the Old Lat. *k*) is an interpolation in the First Gospel. Burkitt thinks that 'to thee' in i. 21 appeared in the *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, and that 'him' is a 'mere stylistic addition' in the *Syr.-Sin.* When we add that this MS. includes Mt. i. 18–25, and the parenthesis, 'to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin', in Mt. i. 16, it becomes impossible to suppose that its text is of 'Ebionite origin'. Nor is it any more likely that it represents 'the slip of a scribe'. It is too much of a piece with the entire representation of the MS., of which the most we can say is that it hardens the unique point of view which is characteristic of the Evangelist himself. Whether it represents the original ending of the Genealogy, in a form independent of, and earlier than, the First Gospel, is a point which may be left open, though the view is not one which otherwise finds support from the Genealogy, as it now appears in the Gospel.[1] In any case, *we ought very probably to reject the view that the Syr.-Sin. in Mt. i. 16 asserts, or implies, the physical paternity of Joseph.* It clearly takes ᾧ to 'refer to ἐγέννησεν as well as μνηστευθεῖσα' (Burkitt, p. 263), but, having regard to its character as a whole, the strong probability is that it interprets ἐγέννησεν in the same sense which it bears throughout the earlier links of the Genealogy, viz. of legal parentage (Allen, p. 8). *In this case the scribe who produced the Syr.-Sin. has remained truer to the mind and spirit of the First Evangelist than any other early Christian writer we know.* Whether he has preserved the letter is more open to question.

(4) As regards the rendering (B), it is sufficient to say that the 'Ferrar' Group and the Old Lat. MSS., while representing a text

[1] The foregoing three alternatives are those noted by Dr. Sanday (*Outlines*, p. 199f.), between which, he says, 'the data do not allow us to decide absolutely'.

which differs from (A), *agree in affirming the Virgin Birth.* Some of them do so with emphasis (e.g. *c* and *b*). All of them (except *q*) contain the word 'Virgin', but, with the exception of *c* and *b*, the connexion between ᾧ (*cui*) and μνηστευθεῖσα (*desponsata*) is left ambiguous.

III.

We are left, then, with three readings, for each of which priority may be claimed (those we have indicated by (A) and (B), and that of the *Syr.-Sin.* (C)). It is highly probable that (C) is derived from (B); but it may be well to leave this an open question, so as to have all the possibilities before us.

(1) *Can we, then, explain the textual facts already noticed, if we presume the originality of* (A)?

It is certainly remarkable that, after using ἐγέννησεν in a legal sense throughout the earlier links of the Genealogy (Moffatt, Burkitt, Westcott, Box, Allen, Barnard, A. J. Maclean), the compiler should desert this practice, and use the verb of physical parentage (ἐγεννήθη) in the last link of the chain. The compiler, if we may say so, does not strike us as the kind of man who would have felt the need of this. It seems much more likely that, together with some qualifying clause in reference to Mary, he would have continued to employ ἐγέννησεν in the same sense to the end. This is conjecture; but (on the present theory) it is a conjecture supported by the procedure of the scribes who have produced (B). Their object (on the present supposition) will have been to remove the ambiguities of (A) in Mt. i. 16, so as to state the doctrine more clearly. We could understand, then, their objection to τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, and the change to ᾧ μνηστευθεῖσα π. Μ. What is less easy to understand is the change from ἐγεννήθη to ἐγέννησεν. It is true that ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη is not without ambiguity, as the comment of the Jew in the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* shows.[1] But, if this was a ground of objection, why should the ambiguity be replaced by one that is much greater? As we have seen, the construction of (B) is singularly loose. It is this fact which has clearly invited the modifications represented in the *Syr.-Cur.* and the Old Lat. MSS., and

[1] Referring to the Evangelist the Jew objects: 'He says begat out of Mary' (cf. Conybeare, HJ., vol. i, no. 1, p. 100).

perhaps the *Syr.-Sin.* itself. The reading (B) certainly does not commend itself as a doctrinal modification of (A). Further, the priority of (A) does not help us to account for (C). If, as we believe, (C) is derived from (B), it is needless to discuss the point. But apart from that theory of the origin of (C), our conclusion remains the same. We have seen how near in spirit the scribe of the *Syr.-Sin.* was to the First Evangelist. Can we suppose, then, that he would have demurred to the words, *τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας*? It is very difficult to think so. For these reasons, in spite of its strong attestation, we find it impossible to presume the originality of (A).

(2) *We reach a similar conclusion, if we assume* (B) *to be the true text of Mt. i. 16.* Its singular construction does not readily suggest the craftsmanship of the compiler of the Genealogy. It is true that we can give a very good account of (C) on the present assumption. We can adopt Burkitt's suggestion, and regard it as a paraphrase of (B). But can we derive (A) from (B)? It would be reasonable to explain *ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη* as a correction of *ἐγέννησεν* by a believer who failed to understand the Evangelist's point of view, and who desired a clearer reference to the Virgin Birth. But can we imagine a scribe, or an editor, motived in this way, replacing 'to whom was betrothed the Virgin Mary' by the words 'the husband of Mary'? The question answers itself, and forbids the assumption of the priority of (B).

(3) *Can we, then,* accept Archdeacon Willoughby C. Allen's view, and *find the true text in* (C)?[1] It is quite possible, on this theory, to give a reasonable explanation of (B), but, as in the last case, the difficulty is to account for (A). We can follow the change from *ἐγέννησεν* to *ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη*, but the substitution of *τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας* for the parenthesis found in (C) remains as before an insuperable objection. At the same time Archdeacon Allen has laid down a true and a valuable principle when he writes: 'The earliest Greek form was gradually altered from a desire to avoid words which, though in the intention of the

[1] We ought to add that Allen leaves open the possibility that the parenthesis may be a later addition, and that the original text may have been 'And Joseph begat Jesus'. 'It seems probable . . . that the text underlying S^1 is the nearest approach now extant to the original Greek, and it must remain possible that even here the relative clause is an insertion' (p. 8).

writer they expressed legal parentage, not paternity, in fact, might be misunderstood by thoughtless readers' (p. 8).

Our results thus far are negative, but they are not barren. We have frankly to admit that *no extant reading, as a whole, commends itself as the original text of Mt. i. 16.* On the other hand, *we can form a reasonably good idea of what that text was like.* If we are to make any further advance, we must have recourse to *conjecture.* It is not at all impossible that future discoveries may enable us to travel upon firmer ground. Such a discovery as that of the *Syr.-Sin.* MS. by Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson in 1902 shows that this hope is not unreasonable. But meantime, unless we are content to acquiesce in a negative conclusion, we have no choice but to resort to conjecture. This does not mean a leap in the dark. It is in every way likely that parts of the true text are embedded in the extant readings, and it is by no means impossible that, taken together, these readings may contain the whole. *It may be, that is to say, that the true text of Mt. i. 16 has found its grave in the readings we possess.* Whether its resurrection can be accomplished is another question. But, in view of the general character of the true text, as indicated above, the attempt need not be foreclosed. Obviously, our results will be tentative, but they should be something more than dubious and uncertain in the extreme.

IV.

In attempting to reconstruct the true text of Mt. i. 16, we may venture the following suggestions:

(1) *We have very good ground for regarding* τὸν. λ. **X**. *as part of the true text* (though whether we read the nom. or the acc. depends upon whether we prefer ἐγεννήθη or ἐγέννησεν). Not only does this expression occur both in (A) and (B), but it is also one which we should naturally expect the Genealogy to contain. A Genealogy constructed to show the Messiahship of Jesus ends fittingly with the words 'who is called Christ'.

(2) *It is very probable indeed that the original text included* ἐγέννησεν and not ἐγεννήθη. (i) On this view, we can readily understand the misconceptions that would arise, and give a reasonable explanation of the textual variants which exist. (ii) As

indicating legal parentage, the expression is not one from which we think the compiler would be likely to shrink. (iii) It is not easy to suppose that those who have employed ἐγέννησεν in the reading (B) would have used this form if they had not found it already in the text.

(3) *It is probable that Mt. i. 16 contained a reference to Mary.* This view is supported by the earlier references to women in the Genealogy. 'It is inconceivable that the Evangelist, who thought it served the purpose that he had in hand to mention Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah's wife, should leave the step containing Joseph bare' (Burkitt, p. 264).

(4) *Of the two qualifying clauses open to us,* τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας *is more likely to be the older.* (i) It is an expression such as we can easily suppose the First Evangelist would use (cf. Mt. i. 19). (ii) It safeguards the Virgin Birth; there would be no point in describing Joseph as '*the husband of Mary*' unless that expression bore some special meaning. (iii) In the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* we possess 'actual proof' that the phrase was 'liable to change' (Burkitt, quoted above, p. 106). (iv) The expression could easily be misunderstood at a time when the interest in the Davidic Sonship was no longer paramount. (v) In that case the phrase ᾧ μνηστ. π. *M.* would commend itself as a doctrinal modification. (vi) It would be altogether less easy to say this of τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας.

(5) *It is probable that Joseph was mentioned twice.* (i) This conclusion follows of necessity, if, as we have argued, ἐγέννησεν and not ἐγεννήθη is original. (ii) It is implied in the earlier steps of the Genealogy. (iii) It is attested by the *Syr.-Sin.*, and the omission of the second Ἰωσήφ in (A) and (B) is not difficult to explain (see later).

(6) *It is on the whole more probable that* τὸν ἄνδρα *M. followed the first* Ἰωσήφ *and not the second.* (i) This view is supported by the compiler's method. 'The practice of the writer is to interpose no words between the name and the verb ἐγέννησεν' (Burkitt, p. 263). (ii) This order enables us to give an explanation of the fact that both (A) and (B) omit the second Ἰωσήφ (see below).

Gathering together these several results, we obtain the following as the reconstructed text of Mt. i. 16:

Ἰακὼβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσὴφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας·
Ἰωσὴφ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον Χριστόν.

In addition to the reasons already given, we may also urge the fact that, with this text posited, we can give the simplest and least involved account of the origin of (A), (B), (C).

(1) The scribes who have produced (A) substituted the passive (*ἐγεννήθη*) for the active (*ἐγέννησεν*). This caused the second *Ἰωσήφ* to drop out, its place being taken by *ἐξ ἧς* 'from whom' (fem.). *Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγ. Χρ.* followed as a grammatical change.

(2) All that the originators of (B) had to do was to substitute *ᾧ μνηστ. π. M.* for *τὸν ἄνδρα M.*, and then, by omitting *Ἰωσὴφ δέ*, to leave *M.* as the subject of *ἐγέννησεν*.

(3) We may explain (C), with Burkitt, as derived from (B). The Syriac translator was not satisfied with the loose construction of (B). Taking *ᾧ* to refer to *ἐγέννησεν* as well as to *μνηστευθεῖσα*, he made the connexion clearer by inserting a second *Ἰωσήφ* as the subject of the verb. In taking this last step, he either returned unconsciously to part at least of the true reading, or had access to good Greek MSS. which we no longer possess.

It is of interest to compare the reading we have suggested as the original text of Mt. i. 16 with others which have been put forward. In discussing one of these possibilities, Sanday writes (*Outlines*, p. 200): 'If we may suppose that the original text ran *Ἰωσὴφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας ἧ ἐγέννησεν Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον Χριστόν*, that would perhaps account for the two divergent lines of variants better than any other'. In spite of its advantages, this text suffers under two disadvantages from which the one we have preferred is free. (i) Not only is *γεννάω* used in a different sense from that which it has in the rest of the Genealogy, but it is *the very same form of the verb* which is employed differently. (ii) The reading is too smooth and clear. Apart from the phrase *τὸν ἄνδρα M.* no loophole is left for misunderstanding, and so no sufficient starting-point is provided for the subsequent textual variants.

Burkitt has instanced the reading we have preferred. In rejecting the view that the *Syr.-Sin.* represents the true text, he writes (p. 264): 'Had we such a text as *Ἰακ. δὲ ἐγέν. τὸν Ἰωσὴφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας· Ἰωσὴφ δὲ ἐγέννησεν* κτλ. the case would have

been different'. In reference to this suggestion, however, Burkitt says, (i) the evidence does not point that way, (ii) in that case the *Syr.-Sin.* would be further from the original than that of ℵ B and Tertullian, (iii) *Syr.-Sin.* and *k* would 'agree in a common corruption', and we should have to speak of the 'Western' text in the singular number.

The last point raises a large question which it is impossible to consider here. As regards the second objection, while in some respects (C) would be further from the original than (A), in other and more important respects it would be appreciably nearer. In its use of ἐγέννησεν it would be nearer to the original than any reading we possess. As regards the first objection, we have frankly to agree that the textual evidence does not point that way. We cannot point to a shred of MS. evidence to support the conjectured reading. A generation ago this would have been considered a fatal objection. But, in view of the freedom with which the text of the Gospels was handled during the first half of the second century, and which the textual variants illustrate, this objection can no longer be regarded as insuperable. So long as we restrict ourselves to the attested readings, the problem remains insoluble. If, then, we can reach a reasonable conclusion on other lines, we are free to do so. Doubtless, in default of attestation, we can describe our results as no more than tentative. But we have no desire to claim more. As the problem stands at present, the test to be applied is, What reading, conjectured or attested, furnishes the best explanation of the facts at our disposal?, it being remembered that these facts include, not only the textual variants, but also the unique character of the Genealogy itself. It may be, as we have suggested, that new discoveries await us. But, unless we have entirely misread the evidence we already possess, no discovery is to be expected which will completely transform the textual problem.

In conclusion, we may state certain propositions (apart from the question of the exact wording of the true text of Mt. i. 16) which have in their favour a high degree of probability.

(1) The readings which we have called (A) and (B) are independent attempts to alter the original text in the interests of the Virgin Birth; that is, they are 'doctrinal modifications'.

(2) The reading of the Sinaitic Syriac is not unfavourable to the

doctrine. It should no longer be spoken of as 'the eccentric reading', nor should we describe the translator as influenced by 'heretical tendencies'.

(3) *The original text of Mt. i. 16 implied the Virgin Birth, but it was stated from the unique point of view reflected in the Genealogy itself.*

(4) *The text was liable to misunderstanding, and the history of the textual variants is the history of that misunderstanding.*

CHAPTER VI

THE HISTORICAL QUESTION: ITS LIMITS AND BEARINGS

OUR purpose in the final chapter is to co-ordinate the results we have reached, and to discuss their bearing upon the historical question of the Virgin Birth. We have also to determine how far strictly historical considerations can take us; to ask, that is to say, within what limits the problem is historical at all. It will be well first to summarize the conclusions to which we have already come.

(1) The Virgin Birth was not the subject of Apostolic preaching, and apparently was unknown to St. Paul and St. Mark.

(2) St. Luke became acquainted with the tradition for the first time, either when he was in process of writing his Gospel, or immediately afterwards.

(3) The First Gospel presupposes the Virgin Birth tradition, which had probably been known to its readers for some time, sufficiently long for problems to be started and for difficulties to be raised.

(4) No satisfactory proof is forthcoming to show that the Fourth Evangelist definitely rejected the tradition. The most we can say is that his doctrinal sympathies lay in another direction.

On the positive side our most important result is that we can prove from the New Testament itself that belief in the Virgin Birth existed in influential Christian communities at the time when the First and Third Gospels were written. We have no further need, therefore, to consider theories which assign the belief to a later age, and which, by various interpolation-hypotheses, deprive the doctrine of New Testament support. Those who have stated such theories have rendered service in that they have explored an alternative path. On the view we have preferred this path proves to be a cul-de-sac. We have

therefore, to recognize that, whether we accept or reject the Virgin Birth, we must do this in full acknowledgement of the fact that among early witnesses to the belief are two outstanding New Testament Writings.

Can we go further than this? To do so we must consider the First and Third Gospels, in respect of their mutual relations and of what they conjointly imply.

I.

In considering the relation in which the First and Third Gospels stand to each other and to the Virgin Birth three questions are of the greatest interest and importance. (1) *To what extent do the two Gospels imply a common tradition and belief?* (2) *How far back can we trace this tradition?* (3) *In what relation does the public tradition stand to the theory of an earlier tradition of a private and restricted character?*

(1) In answer to the first question, our view is that *each Gospel, in a different way, is a witness to the same tradition.* Too much has frequently been made of the theory that in Mt. and Lk. we have two independent accounts of the Virgin Birth tradition. It may seriously be questioned if this theory is true. Mt. i. 18–25 is misunderstood if it is explained as a Virgin Birth tradition. Like the rest of cc. i, ii, its character is Midrashic, and it is written from an apologetic standpoint. It would therefore be much truer to say that it *implies* the existence of a Virgin Birth tradition as known to the readers of the Gospel. What form that tradition took we are of course unable to say. It is possible that it was similar to the tradition as it appears in Lk. On the other hand, it may be that even in Lk. the form in which the tradition is presented owes something to the Evangelist's craftsmanship. If this is so, it would seem that the narratives of both writers point back to a simpler tradition or belief, from which, in different ways, they came to assume their present form. What is of chief importance is the view that in both Gospels we have, not so much two independent narratives of the Virgin Birth, as rather two independent witnesses to what originally was one and the same tradition.

It cannot escape our notice that, in spite of their obvious differences, Lk. i. 34 f. and Mt. i. 18–25 contain what is sub-

stantially the same statement, a statement which in each passage is central. In Mt. i. 20 we read: '*That which is conceived* (τὸ ... γεννηθέν) *in her is of the Holy Spirit*'; and in Lk. i. 35, after the reference to the Holy Spirit, we read: '*That which is to be born* (τὸ γεννώμενον) *shall be called holy, the Son of God*'. There is much to be said for the view that both expressions point back to a common original, to a primitive belief that Jesus was 'born of the Holy Spirit' (cf. Harnack, *Date of Acts*, &c., pp. 142 ff.).

If then we are unable to accept the view that in Mt. and Lk. we have two independent accounts of the Virgin Birth, we may well ask if the loss is a real one. It is probably nothing of the kind. There was indeed a certain advantage in feeling able to point to two diverse traditions which converged upon one fact. Nevertheless, the argument always had a certain weakness. We had to account for the two different traditions, and the explanation was a theory we could never prove. It may be that St. Luke's story goes back for its authority to Mary; it is very doubtful if St. 'Matthew's' has any historical connexion with Joseph; but in either case neither assumption is justifiable in an historical inquiry. It must be allowed, we think, that our view has sounder advantages. Instead of claiming validity for two diverse traditions, we can point to two very different narratives, which arise out of the same belief and are independent witnesses to its existence in the primitive Christian community.

(2) *To what point, then, can we trace this tradition?*

We have argued that the Virgin Birth tradition first began to gain currency in the circles in which St. Luke moved at the time when the Third Gospel was being written. We have also seen that the tradition was already known to the readers of the First Gospel. If these conclusions are valid, it is evident that the relative order in which the two Gospels were written will determine the farthest point to which we can trace the Virgin Birth tradition as publicly known. What, then, is the order of composition in the case of Mt. and Lk.?

We may frankly admit that if priority must be assigned to Mt., it becomes difficult to understand how St. Luke could have no knowledge of the Virgin Birth at the time when he first took up his pen. For, on this view, we ask, Must not the tradition have already reached the circles in which he was moving at the

time? It would certainly be more favourable to our theory if we could assign priority to the Third Gospel. In this case we should have a very simple account to give of the history of the tradition. We should discover it emerging for the first time in St. Luke's Gospel, and we should have a ready explanation (in the fact of the interval between the two works) for the apologetic note in the later Gospel.

But the priority of the two Gospels is not a question to be decided simply by the attitude which the Evangelists display towards the Virgin Birth. Mt. and Lk. must be compared throughout. When this is done there do not appear to be sufficient grounds for giving a vote in either direction (cf. Stanton, GHD., ii, p. 368). All that we can say is that the two Gospels are independent works, and must have been written about the same time. If there was an interval, it cannot have been great, for there are no sufficient signs that either writer was acquainted with the work of the other. It is especially difficult to think that St. Luke would have neglected the First Gospel, if it had been accessible to him (cf. Lk. i. 1–4).

If, however, we accept, as a working hypothesis, the view that the two Gospels were written independently of each other, and more or less simultaneously,[1] it will still follow that the Virgin Birth tradition was already known in at least one influential primitive Christian community (that to which the First Gospel was addressed) while it was unknown to St. Luke.[2] Is this a fatal objection, or does such a position represent what may well have been the actual situation? We do not think that the difficulty is too great.

The tides by which traditions flow in different places are not simultaneous; they differ in time, in height, and in volume. No practice could be more mischievous than the habit of dating the relative spread of early beliefs simply by the dates of contemporary documents. Regard must be paid to local conditions.

[1] Cf. Jülicher, INT. (Eng. Tr.), p. 367: 'In my opinion, both took up their pens more or less simultaneously, each unaware of the other's work, and both actuated essentially by the same motive, i. e. that of bestowing a Gospel upon the Church which should be at once complete, and well adapted both to refute unjust accusations from outside and to edify the believers themselves.'

[2] This appears in the fact that the First Gospel implies, as we have seen, that the doctrine had already been known to its readers for some time.

In life as in nature there are variations of current and of coast formation. There are limits, of course, within which this caveat holds good; but, provided the interval of time is not too great, the view that St. Luke could begin to write in ignorance of a tradition already known elsewhere is not self-condemned. After all, St. Luke himself had access to much tradition which presumably was unknown to the First Evangelist (witness St. Luke's special matter).

Concerning the length of time we can allow the Virgin Birth tradition to have been already known elsewhere, when St. Luke began to write, there is room for difference of opinion. If, as we have contended, he became acquainted with it in the process of writing or immediately afterwards, the period can scarcely have been considerable. Perhaps it ought to be estimated in months rather than in years, but to say more would be idle speculation.

The farthest point therefore to which we can trace the existence of the Virgin Birth as a public tradition is some little time previous to the composition of the Third Gospel.

(3) It is a perfectly fair assumption to make that the public tradition must have had a *private* vogue before, and perhaps for some time before, it became public property. This view becomes especially probable in the light of what we have just seen, viz. that the spread of the public tradition among the primitive Christian communities covered an appreciable period of time. The question of the historical truth of the Virgin Birth is precisely the question of how far back the private tradition can be traced; whether it can go back to Mary the mother of Jesus, and whether satisfactory reasons can be given for a silence which extends beyond the period covered by the Pauline Epistles and the Second Gospel, and is broken only at last in the interval which shortly preceded the composition of the Gospels of Mt. and Lk. In this lies the real historical problem. *Can the theory of a private authoritative tradition be vindicated?* There are several questions which bear upon this problem. They are: (1) The question of the date of the First and of the Third Gospels; (2) The extent to which the credibility of the Gospels permits of the possibility of error; (3) The Alternative Theories of the origin of belief in the Virgin Birth; (4) The theological aspect of the tradition.

II.

The relation in which the question of *the Date of the Gospels* stands to the results reached is sufficiently clear. If we could fix the time when Mt. and Lk. were written, we could determine within comparatively narrow limits when the Virgin Birth tradition first gained currency. A conclusion upon this point would materially affect our estimate of the historical value of the tradition.

Until this stage we have deliberately refrained from assigning dates to the Gospels. The only things we have assumed are the priority of Mk. and the practically contemporaneous origin of Mt. and Lk. Our justification for this course lies in the great variety of opinion which exists on the question of date, and hence the desirability of keeping clear, as long as we can, from considerations which must vitally affect the results secured.

Unfortunately, as we have said, no sort of unanimity exists upon the question of the date of the Gospels. A glance at the extremely useful table which Dr. Moffatt prints on page 213 of his Introduction makes this clear. At first sight the position would appear chaotic, and we might well shrink from attempting to connect our results with specific dates. It is impossible, moreover, in a work like the present, to discuss the question in detail. Such a problem ought to be considered independently, and with regard to all the facts of the case. It would seem best therefore to ask what the consequences are, if we incline to any one of certain representative dates. We are at liberty, of course, to indicate our personal preferences, but, for the reasons stated, we shall have to agree to a measure of uncertainty. This is disappointing, but the responsibility must lie at the right door, and that door is the present failure of Biblical Scholarship to arrive at a consensus of opinion on the question of the date of the Gospels. Perfect agreement there will never be, but until there is substantial agreement every historical investigation into questions of New Testament origins must prove incomplete.

The problem of the date of the Gospels is not, however, so chaotic as might at first sight appear. There is a strongly marked disposition to recede from the extremes on both sides, and there is a very considerable agreement that the period from 60 to

100 A.D. covers the time during which the Synoptic Gospels were written. There is also a consensus of opinion that the Second Gospel cannot have been written later than about 70 A.D. Every decade, and almost every year, however, between 60 and 100 A.D. finds advocates for the composition of Mt. and Lk. There are, nevertheless, three periods which find special favour. These may be briefly mentioned.

(1) The first period we may note is the closing years of the first century. For this view the main arguments are (i) the supposed dependence of St. Luke upon Josephus, and (ii) the ecclesiastical tone of certain passages in the First Gospel.

(2) A second view brings both Mk. and Lk. within St. Paul's lifetime, and dates Mt. shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. This is the opinion of Harnack (*Date of Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels*). It has not won a large following, either in Germany or in this country, but it is probably nearer the truth than the previous view.

(3) A third period is the time about 80 A.D. One advantage of this view, as Dr. Plummer candidly admits (ICC., St. Lk., p. xxxi), is the fact that it avoids the difficulties which beset the other two. The main argument which commends it to Dr. Plummer is that 'such a date allows sufficient time for the "many" to "draw up narratives" respecting the acts and sayings of Christ'.

It remains for us to indicate what bearing these representative dates have upon the Virgin Birth tradition in the light of our results.

It is clear that if we must date Mt. and Lk. in the closing years of the first century, the historical value of the tradition is reduced to a minimum. For, if that tradition is historical, we are compelled to assume that for a period of about ninety years the story was jealously guarded, first by Mary herself and then by a chosen few to whom it was revealed. But who will believe this? If we accept Harnack's dates, then the period about 60 A.D. will be the time when belief in the Virgin Birth first began to spread. While, if we prefer the third alternative, we must fix upon a time some fifteen to twenty years later, i.e. the period from 75 to 80 A.D.

It is evident that the case for the historical truth of the tradition

is at its strongest if Harnack's dates can be accepted. Looking at the question from the sole standpoint of the time-interval, we do not believe that the third period is impossibly late. However we look at the question, we are unable to bring the public tradition within the lifetime of Mary. But, provided we are not compelled to date the Gospels at the close of the century, there do not seem to be insuperable difficulties—so far as the time-element is concerned—against connecting that public tradition with those who were near her person.

It will be seen that the question of the date of the Gospels is an important one. The utmost, however, we are able to glean in this field is a somewhat negative advantage. Our conclusion is that no insuperable difficulty stands in the way. Obviously, the onus of proof yet remains. The long period of silence must be explained, and the truth of the tradition vindicated.

III.

We must next briefly consider the question of *the historical value of the Synoptic Gospels*, so far as it bears upon our immediate problem. It is right to urge that our first aim must be to examine the Virgin Birth tradition without bias or presuppositions of any kind. But it is no less true to say that our estimate of the credibility of the Gospels as a whole must react upon that task in the end. Whether the Synoptic Gospels are but a tissue of legends, or whether they fulfil a good standard of historical value, are questions which cannot be ignored.

For those who claim infallibility, as well as inspiration, for the Evangelists, the problem is at an end: Lk. and Mt. teach the Virgin Birth; the doctrine is therefore true! But for most people to-day that short and easy path is impossible. The Gospels do not claim infallibility, and their contents do not bespeak it. There can be no question that a trained observer of to-day would have described many incidents in the life of Jesus very differently. There are parables which have been unconsciously hardened into miracles, sayings of Jesus which have been misunderstood, stories which have grown amidst the exigencies of controversy and in the process of evangelization. These things are no more than we might expect. They were inevitable;

unless we credit the Evangelists with a mechanical preservation from error which finds no justification beyond our own preconceived notions of what a Gospel ought to be. Nor do such admissions rob the Gospels of real worth. On the contrary, they throw their historical value into strong relief. For to perceive that the natural infirmities of the human mind have left their trace upon the Evangelic Records is only to prepare the way for us to recognize how close in the main the Evangelists have kept to the real facts of history. The significant fact is not that they have made mistakes, but that they have made so few that are of real importance. We have only to compare their work with the Apocryphal Gospels to see, in the case of the Evangelists, what restraint the solid facts of history exercised upon the natural tendencies of their minds. Jülicher, who does not hesitate to say that what the Evangelists relate is 'a mixture of truth and poetry' (INT., Eng. Tr., p. 368), nevertheless declares that 'the Synoptic Gospels are of priceless value, not only as books of religious edification, but also as authorities for the history of Jesus' (ib., p. 371). 'The true merit of the Synoptists', he says, 'is that, in spite of the poetic touches they employ, they did not repaint, but only handed on, the Christ of history.'

What bearing has such an estimate of the Gospels upon the historic truth of the Virgin Birth tradition? Obviously, it does not save us from the trouble of testing the tradition by such tests as we can apply. That the tradition has found a place in the New Testament is not in itself a certificate of truth. The Evangelists certainly believed the tradition; they were intellectually honest; but they may have been mistaken. The ultimate question is the truth of the authorities upon which they rested and of the belief they reflect. Their importance as writers is that they countersign the tradition with the high authority they possess. But, however high their authority, it is not that of infallibility. The truth of the Gospels is the truth of their sources. As regards the Virgin Birth tradition, the sources cannot be traced back to Mk. and Q, the two primary Synoptic documents, but to the later tradition of the Christian Church, at the time when Mt. and Lk. were written. The First and Third Evangelists have endorsed that tradition; the problem of the Virgin Birth is whether they were right. Nothing that we have

said in this section must be construed to prejudge that question. That the Evangelists have accepted the tradition, for us unquestionably gives it a higher value; but it is not a determinative value. The main result is to make yet clearer the final issue, which is, we repeat, whether the story which the Evangelists endorse can be traced back to an authoritative source. Has it the sanction of Mary or of those who may be supposed to have known her mind?

IV.

In many discussions of the Virgin Birth, the question of *Alternative Theories* occupies a prominent place. Our purpose in the present section is to ask what place it may legitimately be given. Has it the importance which is often claimed?

Attention has frequently been called to the inability of those who reject the Virgin Birth to agree upon an alternative theory. The failure is patent. Harnack and Lobstein, on the one side, plead for a Jewish-Christian origin for the doctrine, in which the influence of Isa. vii. 14 played a decisive part; on the other side, Soltau, Schmiedel, Usener, and others, trace the tradition to the effect of non-Christian myths. Not only so; the advocates of each theory specifically reject the other. Lobstein, for example, thinks that 'it would be rash to see direct imitations or positive influences' in the analogies 'between the Biblical myth and legends of Greek or Eastern origin'. While there was mutual action between the worship or doctrine of paganism and advancing Christianity, 'nothing warrants historical criticism in considering the tradition of the miraculous birth of Christ as merely the outcome of elements foreign to the religion of Biblical revelation' (*The Virgin Birth of Christ*, p. 76). Schmiedel, on the other hand, rejects the Jewish-Christian origin of the tradition, 'Nor would Isa. vii. 14 have been sufficient to account for the origin of such a doctrine unless the doctrine had commended itself on its own merits. The passage was adduced only as an afterthought, in confirmation. . . . Thus the origin of the idea of a virgin birth is to be sought in Gentile-Christian circles' (EB., col. 2963 f.).[1]

It is not strange, perhaps, that some writers have pressed these

[1] Cf. Usener to the same effect, EB., col. 3351.

contradictions into the service of Apologetics. Thus, for example, Dr. Orr does not scruple to say: 'As in the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrim, "neither so did their witness agree together"' (op. cit., p. 152). He even presents the remarkable argument that Dr. Cheyne's theory 'gives the death-stroke to all the theories that have gone before it', and yet is itself 'absolutely baseless' (ib., p. 178). Sweet's argument is more cautiously introduced. He recognizes that the contention has its limits. He instances Bossuet's argument against the Reformation drawn from the Variations of Protestantism and G. H. Lewes's inference from the History of Philosophy that philosophy is impossible (op. cit., p. 299). But, having said this, Sweet argues that the critics agree in nothing 'save dislike and depreciation of the documents', and that 'their theories are mutually destructive'.

It appears to us that this line of argument is open to serious objection; it is unfair, and it is unwise.

It is unfair, because it is neither uncommon nor unreasonable to find men agreed in rejecting a tradition or belief, and yet at variance in respect of theories of origin. It is one thing to say that a belief is untrue; quite another thing to account for its existence. That men agree upon the one point is more significant than that they differ upon the other. The view we have mentioned is unwise, because its triumph may be short-lived. There is always room for the emergence of a better alternative theory, which shall combine the excellences, and avoid the weaknesses, of pioneer attempts.

It does not need a prophet to suggest that the next alternative theory will be psychological and eclectic. If the tradition is not historical, it is not likely that we can account for its rise by one factor alone. We may regard it as established that prophecy alone did not create the tradition, and that it was not invented on the analogy of non-Christian myths. Nevertheless, it may be that Isa. vii. 14, together with the idea that underlies non-Christian legends, played an important part in the formation of the Christian tradition. If the tradition is not historical, its ultimate origin must be sought in the overwhelming impression which Jesus left upon believing hearts and minds; in the conviction that from the time of His Birth, and not only at His Baptism and Resurrection, Jesus Christ was the Son of God by the anointing of the Holy

Spirit. The presumption that His Birth must have been remarkable would be strengthened by the Old Testament stories of the birth of Isaac, of Samson, and of Samuel, and especially by the tradition which already had gathered round the birth of John. It may also have been stimulated by the belief, found the whole world over, that the origin of great men is supernatural and miraculous. Even amongst the Jews the idea was present, that the Messiah's origin would be strange, and that no man would know from whence he came (Jn. vii. 27). If there is reason to presuppose such a point of view, we can easily imagine the electric effect which such a passage as Isa. vii. 14 would have upon those who studied Old Testament prophecies in the light of their experience of Jesus. It is vain to object that it is only in the LXX that this connexion could be established, and that in the Hebrew the word rendered 'virgin' means a young woman of marriageable age. The First Gospel (i. 23) shows that it was the LXX rendering which was already read, and doubtless preferred, in the primitive Christian community. Still more fatuous is it to say, as it has been said again and again, that no Jew ever interpreted Isa. vii. 14 of the Messiah. As well might we say of other passages that no Jew would have interpreted them Messianically! The question is not how Jews regarded Isa. vii. 14, but how it may have appeared in the eyes of Jews who had come under the spell of Jesus. The passage cannot have created belief in the Virgin Birth, but it could have crystallized a belief for which wonder and speculation had prepared the way. 'So it must have been!' men could well have argued. On this supposition the belief antedated the tradition. But that beliefs have created traditions again and again is enough to show that it could have been so here. Nor is the time-element the insuperable difficulty it has been supposed to be. The idea that a myth would require fifty years to grow is absurd.[1] Provided the parents of Jesus were already dead, the myth could have sprung up new born.

In sketching the foregoing theory our purpose is not to assert its truth, but rather to illustrate its by no means inherent improbability. It could be true; or, at any rate, this judgement

[1] Cf. Loofs, *What is the Truth about Jesus Christ?*, p. 92 f.: 'Legends arise much more quickly than is assumed by liberal theology since Strauss'.

might any day have to be passed upon some alternative theory, superior to any that has yet been stated. The agreement of the Virgin Birth tradition with historic fact may be the true solution of the problem, but it is not the only solution that is possible, nor can its superiority be established by the comparative method alone. We therefore work along wrong lines if we attempt to argue the historic character of the Virgin Birth tradition by dwelling upon the incongruities and contradictions of alternative theories. The baleful attractiveness of such a method ought strenuously to be resisted. It may yield a few showy triumphs, but few, if any, solid results. Of course, if we have first satisfied ourselves that the Virgin Birth is historically true, the practice is less objectionable; but it is doubtful if even then it adds much to results otherwise obtained. To include the method in the process of proof is to build upon sand.

On the other hand, this view is equally sound, if our solution of the problem is one of the alternative theories to which we have referred. We have sketched a theory which we have claimed might be true. But what more could be claimed by the comparative method? Its justification or lack of justification lies elsewhere. The possible may not be the probable, nor the probable the true. The importance of the question we have discussed in the present section is that it reveals what are the by-paths and what is the high-road of a true investigation. The question of alternative theories is purely secondary. The high-road is where we left it at the end of Section II. Can the tradition, endorsed by the First and Third Evangelists, be vindicated?

V.

The ultimate considerations which determine a true estimate of the Virgin Birth tradition are doctrinal. It is one of the chief merits of Lobstein's well-known book that he so clearly recognizes this fact: 'What must finally turn the scale . . . are reasons of a dogmatic and religious order' (op. cit., p. 79).

We need make no apology for not having dealt with the question of the possibility of the Miraculous Birth from the standpoint of Science. We do not propose to consider the question at length even now. The objection that miracles are impossible

has long been exploded. In a famous letter to the *Spectator* (February 10, 1866) Huxley wrote: '. . . denying the possibility of miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative Atheism', and Atheism, he said, is 'as absurd, logically speaking, as polytheism'. What we call a 'miracle' may be no more than the divine operation within the domain of law itself. We have therefore no ground for saying that a virgin birth is impossible; while, in the case of One so unique as Jesus Christ, such an assertion would be utterly absurd. We do not really need any support which may be gained from the question of Parthenogenesis. The question is in the first place one of evidence.

But if primarily the question is one of evidence, it does not stop there. The historical and the theological aspects of the problem overlap; we cannot determine the question by weighing evidence alone.

If we attempt to confine ourselves to a purely historical inquiry, the verdict must be 'Not proven'.[1] It is true, on the one hand, that the late appearance of the tradition is not an insuperable difficulty. The theory of a long-treasured secret has a logic of its own. On the other hand, by the conditions of the case, we are unable to interrogate the witnesses. We cannot ask them whence they derived what they tell us. We cannot demonstrate that the story they relate has the ultimate authority of Mary. All that we can reach is a primitive belief, generally accepted within New Testament times, which presumably implies an earlier private tradition. Beyond that point we cannot travel—within the limits of the evidence alone.

Substantially this position is recognized by Dr. Gore in *Dissertations*. While affirming his belief that the historical evidence is 'in itself strong and cogent', he says frankly that 'it is not such as to compel belief'. 'There are ways to dissolve its force', he continues. The last sentence is not very happily phrased, but it need not detain us. The point that is of greatest importance is expressed by Dr. Gore as follows:

'. . . to produce belief there is needed—in this as in almost all other questions of historical fact—besides cogent evidence, also a perception of the meaning and naturalness, under the circumstances, of the event to which evidence is borne. To clinch the

[1] So Prof. Percy Gardner, quoted in *Faith and Freedom*, p. 168.

historical evidence for our Lord's Virgin Birth there is needed the sense that, being what He was, His human birth could hardly have been otherwise than is implied in the Virginity of His mother' (ib., p. 64).

The present work is, in part, a foot-note to, or illustration of, this principle. We may therefore be pardoned for a further reference to it in a passage from F. C. Burkitt's *Gospel History and its Transmission*, in which it finds an almost classic statement:

'Our belief or disbelief in most of the Articles in the Apostles' Creed does not ultimately rest on historical criticism of the Gospels, but upon the general view of the universe, of the order of things, which our training and environment, or our inner experience, has led us severally to take. The Birth of our Lord from a virgin and His Resurrection from the dead—to name the most obvious Articles of the Creed—are not matters which historical criticism can establish' (p. 350 f.).

It is clear, then, that if further advance is to be made, we must enter the realms of doctrine. What doctrinal purpose, we must ask, does the Virgin Birth serve? Does it explain the sinlessness of Jesus? Is it necessary to the doctrine of the Incarnation? Is it congruous with the doctrine of the Person of Christ? It is not contended that an answer to these questions in the affirmative would prove the event to have happened. Nevertheless, such an answer would unquestionably invest the New Testament tradition with a yet higher probability, sufficiently great, in our judgement, to make belief in its historical character reasonable. If, however, we have to answer the doctrinal questions in the negative, then the historical character of the tradition receives a fatal blow. The opinion, so frequently expressed, that, in any case, the Virgin Birth is not a doctrine of essential importance, is one that calls for scrutiny. If it means that a man may be a sincere follower of our Lord, whether he believes the doctrine or not, it is, of course, a truism. But if it means that the doctrine is of no importance in relation to the Incarnation and the Person of Christ, that is perhaps the strongest argument that can be adduced *against* the credibility of the miracle. What is doctrinally irrelevant is not likely to be historically true.

It does not fall in with the scope of this work to enter fully

into the theological question. Our purpose has been to examine the historical and critical questions and to show where the real problem lies. Criticism cannot solve that problem. Nevertheless, its contribution is not barren. It can discuss interpolation theories; it can treat of the literary form which the tradition has assumed in the Gospels. It can date—imperfectly it is true—the time when the belief became current. It can apply broad tests of credibility. We ourselves believe that it can say the miracle may have transpired. But it cannot say more. The last word is with Theology.

On the theological side, the question is probably more far-reaching than is commonly supposed. Individual Christian doctrines can never be treated *in vacuo*; they are inter-related one with another. It is often said that those who reject the Virgin Birth reject also the physical Resurrection of Jesus, the Ascension, and many of the miracles reported in the Gospels. The statement is largely true; it is possible we ought also to include in it the doctrine of the Pre-existence of Christ. The reason is that these denials belong to the same general habit of mind; they are part of the content of what has been called a 'reduced Christianity'. It is impossible, therefore, adequately to discuss the question of the Virgin Birth on its theological side, without raising the larger question, whether this so-called 'reduced Christianity' is not the true faith, as distinguished from a 'full Christianity' which in reality is florid and overgrown. Sweet can scarcely be said to go too far when he writes: 'In short, and this is the gist of the whole matter, in this controversy concerning the birth of Christ, two fundamentally different Christologies are groping for supremacy' (ib., p. 311). This fact has not always been recognized by those who think of the Virgin Birth, but there can be no question of its truth. The Virgin Birth is part of a larger problem; it must ultimately be established, if at all, as a corollary, not as an independent conclusion. The larger problem is whether we can still hold the Trinitarian Theology and the Two-Nature Doctrine of the Person of Christ, or whether we must give to the Immanence of God a place greatly in excess of any it has yet held in Christian thought; whether, indeed, we can feel it adequate to speak of Christ as One in whom the Immanent God revealed and expressed Himself

in an altogether unique and ultimately inexplicable way. In any case, the conflict is one of Christologies. The purely naturalistic interpretation of Jesus holds a more and more precarious place in the field. This, then, is the problem of the present and of the immediate future. It is nothing less than the problem which every age has had to face since the days of Jesus of Nazareth—the problem of the Incarnation.

The present writer takes no shame to say that upon the theological aspect of the Virgin Birth he has not yet been able to satisfy his mind. The longer the question is studied the less easy it becomes airily to brush the miracle aside and call it myth. We speak of those who are impressed by the unique spiritual greatness of Jesus, and who cannot explain for themselves His Person in terms of humanity alone. The hesitation does not spring from vacillation, nor, we hope, from lack of courage and strength of mind. It springs out of a sense of the uniqueness of Jesus. Have we adequately grasped His greatness? Can we say what is, or what is not, congruous with His Person? It is open to serious question whether the individual can expect, or ought to expect an answer to these questions out of his experience and thought alone. Brief discussions of the Virgin Birth by individual writers do not carry us very far. What is needed more than anything else is a yet fuller disclosure of the unfettered mind of the Christian Church; and for this we must wait.

This last statement may perhaps seem strange. Has not the Church already expressed her corporate mind? Has she not committed herself to the Virgin Birth tradition? Can we not find it in Ignatius, in Justin, and in the Creeds of the Undivided Church? That these things are so is too patent to be denied. But has the Church expressed her *unfettered* mind? Has she said her final word? Has she, indeed, ever been in a position to do these things? The appeal to the almost unbroken external witness of the Catholic Church does not carry us so far as we might think. Once the Gospels had attained canonical authority the rest was a foregone conclusion. The status given to the Gospels carried everything else with it, and the Church was no longer free to judge. It is written, therefore it was so! Moreover, the question of the Virgin Birth was largely overshadowed

in the struggle with Docetism. It is only in modern times that a more intelligent attitude towards the Gospels permits the Church freely to ponder the Virgin Birth tradition in the light of her experience of Christ. We may cherish the hope that she has yet greater things to say of Christ than any she has yet uttered. It is in its relation to that voice that the Virgin Birth will find its place.

Where, then, shall we look for this expression of corporate mind? Not perhaps again in Consiliar Decrees, though who can say? There is, however, a corporate mind that finds expression in the affirmations of simple believers, and in the writings of Christian thinkers the world over. The affirmations are neither the medley nor the babel they are sometimes thought to be. There is no colourless uniformity, but there is a real and growing unity, a harmony in which varied voices blend. No one can survey Christendom without seeing that everywhere denominational walls become less and less forbidding, and that every year it is more difficult to classify Christian thinkers under the prim labels of exclusive schools. Thought is unbound, but it is not chaotic. The thousand streams fall to the rivers which flow onward towards the sea that is never full. Those only may be pessimistic who cannot take long views. We may believe that the Spirit will yet guide His Church into all the truth. The individual thinker whose voice breaks the silence will ever be needed. Yet his task is but a limited one; he too must listen. For unless, beneath his affirmations, we hear the undertone of a corporate faith and experience, his voice will be but the echo that rings among the empty hills.

One thing is certain. Whatever the ultimate issue, it must be gain, even if gain through loss. Whether it be historical or not, the Virgin Birth tradition must always be full of beauty and of truth.

If, on the one hand, the tradition is involved in the corporate experience of Christ, if it is congruous with what He was and is, then, admittedly, the gain is great. For this means increased confidence in the facts which the Evangelists relate and the primitive community believed: there is no breach with the past. It means too another foothold in history for the theological interpretation of the Person of Christ. And these are things not lightly to be surrendered, save at the command of Truth.

If, on the other hand, the story is a legend of the Christian Faith, that is not an end. Strangely enough, if the tradition is not historical, it thereby becomes a valuable piece of Christian apologetic. Who was this Jesus, we ask, of whom men dared to believe that He was born of a virgin? The faded wreath is no less the tribute of undying love. That Jewish Christians could explain the unique divine personality of Jesus by the miracle of a virgin birth is—if we must solve the problem so—the highest tribute they could pay. If we find it hard to understand how they could think of Him in this way, without the warrant of the fact, it may be that our difficulty is just the measure of our failure to grasp the wonder of their love. If, in the end, we must call poetry what they called fact, it will not be because we are strangers to their faith. They too were bound by the spell of that Transcendent Face in which is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

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